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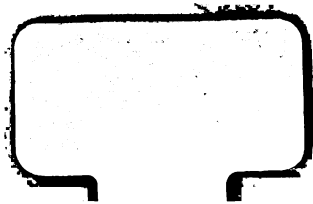


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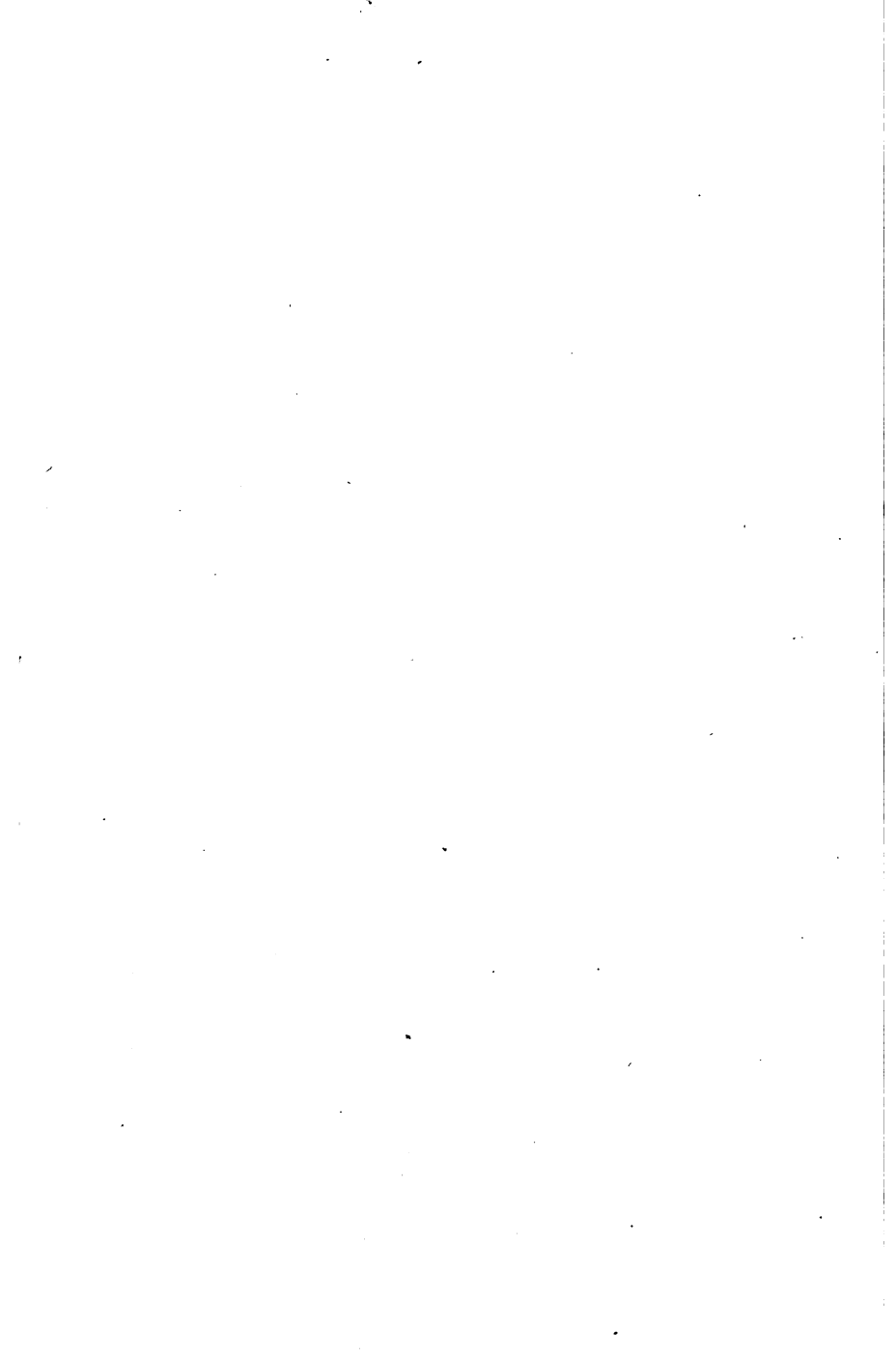


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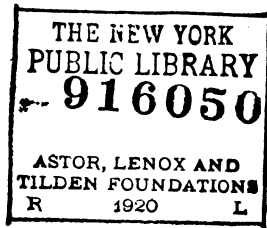
THE ROMANCE OF A PIANISTE

BY
JENNIE IRENE MIX



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AT FAME'S GATEWAY

CHAPTER I

JOSEPHINE stood in the middle of the pastor's study in the Old Brick Church of Parksburg, surrounded by the leading members of the Ladies' Aid Society.

"Do I look all right?" she asked, turning round and round on her toes.

The replies came with confusing rapidity.

"You look just lovely."

"Your sash is a little one-sided. There, that's better."

"That shade of pink's awful becomin'. I never seen anyone with dark hair who was so light complected."

"Your Aunt Mary never made a prettier dress than that. Not even for a bride."

"Say, Josie, you must smile when you go out on the platform. I read once in the *Home Magazine* how everybody that goes before an audience has to smile, else they ain't a success. They got to look happy even if their hearts are breakin'."

"I'd like to know how she can help smilin', seein' it's her benefit concert. And, anyway, she knows better'n any magazine what to do before an audience. Hasn't she been playin' for 'em all over this part of Ohio since she could set on a piano stool?"

"Seems t' me you oughter wore flowers."

"She couldn't play with flowers on. They'd be in her way."

"Well, we've got flowers on the platform," said Mrs.

Gates, chairman of the committee charged with turning the pulpit into a concert stage. "There's a row of red and pink geraniums across the front. And Mrs. Harris sent both her big rubber plants. They're standing just back of the piano stool, a little to one side. And Mrs. Scott had William bring her iron pyramid, the high one with seven shelves. It's just loaded with flowers and vines and looks beautiful. We fixed it so's it hides the steps up to the platform. When the audience first sees Josie it'll look as if she was coming out of a flower garden."

"She looks like a flower herself."

Josephine put her hands to her ears.

"If you keep on talking like this I'll not be able to play a note. Oh, I'm so nervous!"

Mary Prescott, who had been standing quietly in the background, slipped through the crowd to the side of her niece and put an arm about her.

"Now don't you be nervous, dearie. There isn't any reason for you to feel that way about playing before the people of your own town."

"My, but you do look awful tired, Mary," said Mrs. Gates, sympathetically, to the worn frail little woman.

At this moment Mrs. Hunter, president of the Ladies' Aid, entered with much rustling of black silk.

"The church is going to be jammed. We've had to open the doors into the Sunday school room." There was a chorus of delighted exclamations. "Some people," went on Mrs. Hunter, proudly, "are doubling the price of the tickets. They must have heard that Deacon Hatfield paid five dollars apiece for his and Mother Hatfield's and Susie's."

"Everybody knows it. It was in the paper this morning. And Josie's picture, too."

"In the paper! How nice!" exclaimed Mrs. Hunter. She fanned herself with her handkerchief. "I saw the

picture, but didn't have a minute's time to read what it said about the concert."

"We'd all be glad to pay five dollars apiece if we'd struck oil as rich as the Hatfields have," commented little Mrs. Waters, who had scrimped to get the necessary fifty cents apiece for herself and daughter. She patted Josephine's cheek. "You're going to make Parksburg prouder of you than it's ever been of the Hatfield wells."

"Or than we'll ever be over any gusher struck around here," said Mrs. Gates.

"I should say so!"

"Yes, even if it's the biggest gusher in the country."

"It isn't going to take her long, either."

"There, now, don't say another word to her," interposed Mrs. Hunter, briskly. "You're getting her all wrought up. Oh, here comes Dr. Jewett!"

Josephine extended eager hands to the tall, thin, white-haired man who smiled down at her paternally.

"Dear child," said he, "this is a great night for you and a great night for this church that received you into membership in the spiritual life, and is now sending you forth to become a member of the artistic life. You go with more than our spiritual blessing. Thanks to the Ladies' Aid Society, that has managed this benefit, and to Deacon Hatfield, who has offered to double the amount taken in tonight, you will receive about twelve hundred dollars."

"Oh, Dr. Jewett!"

"We all knew about Deacon Hatfield," said Mrs. Hunter, with impressive importance, "but we saved it for a surprise."

"Why, I never dreamed of such a thing!" exclaimed Josephine. "How can I ever make him understand how I feel about it!" She turned to the group of excited women. "How can I make any of you understand how I feel about what you're doing for me? But I'll make you

all proud of me. Yes, I'll surely do it! And I'll make you proud tonight. Oh, how I wish I could tell you——"

She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. "No, I'm not going to cry. There, see, I'm all right. But my hands are cold. I must warm them." She seated herself on a low chair by the open gas fire. "You know you can't play if your hands are the least bit cold. And mine are always like ice when I'm nervous. I expect they'll be like that when I play for Professor Brandt. Then I'll play badly and he'll refuse to take me for a pupil."

Josephine's confident eyes denied her speech.

"Not take you! Well, I'd like to see the teacher who wouldn't jump at the chance to get you for a pupil." Mrs. Hunter spoke with finality.

"But you know he's a very famous teacher and takes only a few pupils, and won't take anyone who hasn't a great deal of talent."

"No one's worrying about your not having talent enough. All that's ever bothered us about your career is your having the money to get started."

"You're all so good to me."

Josephine's eyes wandered around the study, with its worn desk and table, its cheap oak bookcases, its threadbare carpet. The Ladies' Aid had been giving oyster suppers and strawberry festivals and socials for two years to raise money for new furnishings. And still the fund was far short of what was needed. Yet in one night they were raising enough money to send her to New York! No matter how famous she became, she could never do enough to repay them.

"They sent me to say it's time to begin."

It was Sam Sterling, the pastor's nephew, who spoke. Sam, tall, forceful, auburn-haired, clean-shaven.

Josephine ran to him.

"Oh, Sam, have you heard? Deacon Hatfield's going

to double what's taken in tonight! Dr. Jewett says I'll have twelve hundred dollars. It means success!"

Sam's lips closed in a straight line.

She laughed. "Don't look so glum." Then, in softer tones, as she passed him: "I'm going to play *Träumerei* for an encore."

Träumerei! How many times she had played it just for him, thought Sam, as he stalked out of the study and around to the front entrance. There he walked back and forth. She was going away to have a career. A career! Sam swore beneath his breath. Then, at the sound of a piano within, he wheeled about, and entered the church and made his way to the gallery, where he found a seat in the back row.

Josephine was playing. She had forgotten about Sam. Forgotten even that this was her benefit concert. She was lost in the music. She sat at the big grand imported for the occasion, her slender figure taut, the color mounting her cheeks, her hands now flying swiftly, now lingering caressingly, now crashing out chords that taxed her instrument. The townspeople sat agape, and the less they understood, the more they admired. To them she was even now the artist. And something of the same conviction was in her own mind as she responded radiantly to the applause.

Then she played a Chopin *Scherzo*, and a waltz such as no foot ever danced to. A quick-stepping *Gavotte*, a peasant wedding march, an operatic paraphrase. And, as an encore, *Träumerei*. Ah, Sam! Then the Beethoven *Pastorale*, which was received as one number with two encores. And last, a group of Liszt, beginning with, *Hark, Hark the Lark*, and ending with the *Second Rhapsody*. Then, according to the *Parksburg Journal* the next morning, "the house rose at her and gave her an ovation that made the old church ring."

She was brought back again and again, and each time she looked more radiant, more exultant. Flowers were handed her, and she heaped them on the piano as she had seen other artists do. She turned again to her audience. But now she saw through a blur of tears. After all, this was home. Here were the dearest friends she had in the world. And she was leaving them.

She fled to the study and threw herself into the pastor's easy chair. There the Ladies' Aid and Deacon Hatfield found her.

"Say, Sis," called the deacon from the doorway, "what yer cryin' fer? Y' played like a house afire!"

"Oh," sobbed Josephine, "I'll never be so happy or so miserable again!"

CHAPTER II

EVERYBODY in Parksburg knew that if Mary Prescott hadn't taken her niece to raise she would have married Mathew Hoover, the postmaster. When Josephine, a child of three, was orphaned, Mary Prescott and Mathew Hoover were considered as good as engaged. Parksburg had looked on the prospective match as a pretty good one for Mary, and a mighty lucky one for Mathew. For in those days Mary had more than one suitor knocking at the door of the snug little home which she had inherited from thrifty parents and now maintained by teaching school.

But with the coming of Josephine the teaching had to go. Parksburg wondered what Mary would do. She didn't have money enough to live on. Mary answered the question by announcing she was going to do dressmaking in her home. The few young women in the town who managed to make a semi-annual shopping trip to Toledo received the news coldly. Others, who for years had employed Mrs. Thompson to come to the house, and, amid much commotion, fit them out with waists and skirts and foulard dresses or even tailor suits, all so primly cut, basted, and stitched that style was slaughtered in the process, were amazed that Mary should think she could rival this veteran of the needle. To be sure, Mary always looked stylish, but that was because she was Mary, and not because of her clothes.

But there were a few among the younger girls who turned to her as their sartorial salvation. Anything would be better than sitting or standing, hour after hour, basting or pressing for Mrs. Thompson, and then cleaning up after her every night, threads and pieces all over the floor and chairs and tables.

So Mary got her chance. And Mary proved a greater success as dressmaker than school-teacher, although she had been a better teacher than the average. Within a year she had a waiting list of customers. She was warned that she was working too hard, that it was beginning to show on her, which was true,—blondes fade easily,—but her reply was always the same: "I need every penny I can make."

And she did. For Josephine had been left without a cent. But she brought more than care into Mary's life. An adorable child ("purty as they ever make 'em look in picters," was Andrew Hatfield's verdict), she became Mary's absorbing joy. Mathew Hoover was relegated from the position of suitor to that of friend. "If I wanted to marry, I'd marry you," Mary explained, with her usual candor. "But I'm not going to marry anyone. It's bad enough to ask a man to be stepfather to one's own child, but to ask him to be stepfather to his wife's niece is expecting more of human nature than's in it."

Mathew tried his best to convince her that he would bring up Josie as if she was his own child. But Mary was obdurate. Mathew Hoover was dismissed. And Mary grew old quickly, but happily.

For there was Josie. Josie, who at three was the pet of the town. At five the cutest singer of songs in the whole Sunday school, and the star performer at every festival. At seven beginning piano lessons with old Adolph Reicher, who said she'd be heard from some day. At twelve the prodigy of Parksburg and neighboring towns, playing anything you set before her at sight, and playing in real concerts, too, where you had to pay to get in. At fourteen giving lessons out of school hours and saving money to go to the conservatory at Jordan College. At seventeen leaving for Jordan triumphantly.

When she finished the three-year course a year ahead of

time, Parksburg was not surprised. For she was Josie Prescott.

She was Josie Prescott, the musical wonder of the town, and the prettiest girl that ever walked down Main Street. Just tall enough, lithe of form, with wavy blue-black hair, now worn coiled at the neck; brown eyes that Sam Sterling called "soft and velvety"; skin of a warm pallor except when she was excited, which was often; a mouth that set the hearts of the young men thumping even when they looked at her askance as a girl they couldn't understand; a round chin, usually carried high; hands slender and flexible; and the daintiest feet that ever waltzed upon the floor of Odd Fellows' Hall, over the drug store, where Parksburg, each Saturday night, did honor in Parksburg fashion to Terpsichore.

She had come back from Jordan with a diploma, a gold medal, and an ambition to become a great artist. The diploma was duly framed and hung over the piano. The medal, in its velvet case, occupied the position of honor on the center table. The ambition set its unmistakable seal on her, in eyes, in carriage, in speech.

The few recitals by visiting artists heard at Jordan had kindled this ambition. The three recitals in Toledo and the one in Cleveland (Ah, that night when she first heard Paderewski!) had intensified it. She would become a concert pianist. Not according to Parksburg's idea, oh, no; but a pianist that was famous everywhere, like those she had heard. And she believed she could be better than some of them. Far better than that woman who had played all over Europe as well as America, yet couldn't thrill the audience in Toledo.

Jordan had not discouraged her. Before the end of her first year she was pronounced the most promising pupil ever enrolled at the conservatory. More promising even than that ugly little Russian Jew violinist, who was now known

the world over. Jordan said she had more temperament than he, and learned far more easily.

Then came Alice Sothern to Jordan to give three lectures on art. "These little engagements help out on the railroad fare," she explained to Josephine, whom she had met at a faculty reception and instantly recognized as an unusual type among these drab students from drab little towns throughout the state. To her Josephine confided her ambition to study in New York, then go abroad for the brand, "Made in Europe," which, she had learned at Jordan, every American artist must have, to gain a hearing in his own country. Alice Sothern listened and encouraged. Was it Josephine's playing that made her do this? Or did the young girl's beauty, naïve charm, and eager enthusiasm work the stronger influence?

Alice Sothern did not forget her. She wrote to her from New York. And at Christmas, while Josephine was in Parksburg, came a music case, such a case as she had never dreamed of possessing. Real leather, pliable as a glove, and inside the flap her monogram in silver.

She returned to her last term at Jordan with but one thought. In June she would graduate. Then New York. How she was to manage it, she wasn't sure. But she was going. Perhaps she could teach while she was studying. She had almost earned her way through Jordan teaching. If she couldn't do anything else she could keep on teaching at the conservatory until she had earned the money. They had said she could have a regular position. They were all wonderfully good to her. Even that cross Professor Borowski, the violin teacher. He had promised that if she went to New York he would try to get his friend, the great Anton Brandt, to take her as a pupil.

Borowski had told Josephine how he and Brandt were playmates in Prague where both were born. But Brandt had become famous, while he, Ignace Borowski, who, when

a child, had been stood on tables in cafés to play for all sorts of artists, and had been thought a wonder of talent, was buried alive in a pig of a town. And when he got a pupil worthy of his teaching, what did the pupil do as soon as he became famous? No word how it was Borowski who gave him the start. But Anton Brandt, who was no greater than Borowski, got credit for all he did.

Anton Brandt! The very name thrilled Josephine. He was a great teacher. Professor Borowski had said so. And he had said he would write to this teacher about her.

She must study with him. He would make her an artist. But the lessons would be expensive. And living in New York, too. How was she to get the money?

Josephine worried over this problem during the remaining months at Jordan. She couldn't stay there and teach. It was too poky. She could open a studio in Parksburg and have all the pupils she wanted, for Adolph Reicher had been dead almost two years. But she wanted to get away from Parksburg. She wanted to be where she could see and hear big things. And, anyway, no matter where she taught, it would take years to make the money that way.

So Josephine refused the position of teacher at Jordan offered her after her graduation, and returned to Parksburg with the problem still unsolved. She said little of her anxiety. She knew that Aunt Mary was opposed to her going to New York, yet would make any sacrifice to keep her from being unhappy. . . . Aunt Mary's heart was set on her marrying Sam Sterling. Everybody in Parksburg looked on Sam as the most go-ahead young man in town, especially since he'd become a partner in the dry-goods store. All the girls were crazy over him. All but Josie Prescott. Marry Sam Sterling? No, indeed! Nor any other man for that matter, until she'd become famous. Perhaps then she'd marry a great musician, or a poet or a

painter. Someone she could look up to. She'd never been able to understand how her girl friends could think of nothing but making the men fall in love with them. And it was the same at Jordan. The girls were always talking about the boys and bragging about the proposals they'd had. Well, she'd had proposals, and she couldn't see anything in them to brag about. There was that widower who lived next door. The old silly! And that Fletcher boy. He was nice enough, and the best dancer in Parksburg, but only a boy. She was glad he'd left town, even though the people did say it was her fault. And there was Sam. He hadn't proposed to her, although she knew he was in love with her. She guessed that was why she liked him the best. But even he wasn't as nice as he used to be. Since he knew she was determined to go to New York he'd been grouchy. He needn't think, because he was seven years older than she, that he could dictate to her about her plans. What business was it of his what she did? She was going to New York, that was settled. But how?

In September came a note from Alice Sothern. She was on another lecture tour and would be in Columbus the following Friday. Instead of staying there alone over Sunday, why couldn't she come to Parksburg and see her protégée? Would Josephine engage a room for her at the hotel?

"The hotel, indeed!" wrote Josephine. "You're to stay with Aunt Mary and me."

And Alice Sothern came, after being awaited with trepidation by Aunt Mary and impatience by Josephine. She dropped into her place in the snug little house as if she had been born in Parksburg. A woman of infinite tact, she first won Aunt Mary's heart and then, in succession, the hearts of all those who were fortunate enough to meet her. All except Sam, who was unresponsive. She went to the Old Brick Church and was introduced to Dr. Jewett, Deacon Hatfield, and various members of the Ladies' Aid

and Board of Trustees. After she had left Parksburg, the Ladies' Aid announced that a concert would be given in the church for the benefit of "our young genius, Josephine Prescott, that she may prepare for the concert stage under the instruction of the great teacher, Professor Anton Brandt, of New York."

And so skilfully had Alice Sothern played the rôle of diplomat that to her dying day Mrs. Hunter believed the idea of the benefit originated with her.

CHAPTER III

"I BELIEVE I'll take the Wordsworth with me, Aunt Mary," said Josephine, drawing out a volume from the upper shelf of the open bookcase, that, since she could remember, had stood in the same place in the sitting room.

Aunt Mary did not raise her eyes from her sewing, as she replied in a low voice:

"It'll be nice for you to have it. It's got so many of your pa's markings in it. The Daffodils was his favorite poem."

"It's my favorite poem, too."

Josephine ran a hand caressingly over the books. Old books that included Shakespeare, Tennyson, Longfellow, and Whittier among the poets; Cooper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Hawthorne among the novelists, and Prescott as the one historian.

"They're all your pa's books," Aunt Mary had told her when she first began to read them. "And he liked the poetry best, same as you. He was always reading it in the evening instead of going down town to visit with the other men folks. He'd have made his mark if he'd lived. You got your talent from him, and your beauty from your ma."

Today, Josephine's eyes grew wistful as she lingered before the bookcase. It was like bidding good-by to real people. She hadn't read many books beside these. She'd been too busy with her music. But she knew some of these almost by heart.

"What good times we've had reading them together, Aunt Mary. I'll never forget how excited I got when I was reading *The Marble Faun* out loud to you, and how

terribly disappointed I was at the ending. Do you suppose Donatello had ears like a faun?"

There was no answer. Josephine turned. She caught her breath with a little gasp of dismay. Aunt Mary's sewing had fallen to the floor. Her worn hands lay tightly clasped in her lap. Her head was bowed. The thin shoulders were shaking.

Josephine ran to her, threw an arm about her neck and stroked her hair.

"Aunt Mary! You're crying! I'm making you unhappy! I'm selfish! I don't deserve to go to New York. I've never done a thing for you. And you've been a mother to me. Oh, I love you, Aunt Mary, more than anything in the world! More even than my music. I won't go. I'll stay here with you!"

Aunt Mary untwined the clinging arms and sat erect. As she brushed away the tears, she smiled.

"No, I'm not a bit like a mother. I'm just a sentimental old maid. A mother would be so proud of you she'd make you go whether you wanted to or not."

"I can't leave you! I didn't realize what it would mean for you to be here all alone."

It was Josephine who was crying now. She slipped to the floor and laid her head in Aunt Mary's lap.

Aunt Mary smoothed the soft dark hair. "You don't have to worry about me. I'm going to get along all right. And I don't have to worry about you. Miss Sothern will take good care of you. But I couldn't feel right about your going if you had to live in a boarding house."

Josephine raised her head. "Wasn't it lovely of Miss Sothern to ask me to live with her?"

"It will be just as nice for her as for you," said Aunt Mary, emphatically. Then, with a start:

"My land, Josie Prescott, you get right up! You're sitting on Mrs. Hunter's silk waist!"

Josephine sprang to her feet, laughing, and picked up the waist. Aunt Mary snatched it from her.

"Just look at it! All wrinkled! I'll have to press it. And a hot iron ruins silk."

She looked at Josephine and forgot the waist.

"What on earth have you got on your new tailor skirt for? You know you shouldn't wear it in the house. How many times have I told you to take it off the minute you got home and put it on a hanger?"

"I promised Sam to go for a last walk. I'm to be at the store at three."

"Oh, is that why you're so dressed up? Well, it's all right. Nothing's too good for Sam."

"Pshaw! I didn't dress up to please Sam."

"He'll think you did."

"Well, let him think then," said Josephine with a toss of the head, as she left the room to get her coat and hat.

When she came back she went to the mirror between the windows to give a last touch to her jaunty blue toque.

"Isn't it the dearest hat? That one red rose just sets it off. And I just love this suit. Such a pretty shade of blue. But I'd like it better if you had made it."

"You're not going to New York in any homemade suit. Anyway, tailoring isn't in my line. But I wouldn't have believed it would have fitted you like that when it was ordered by mail."

Josephine stood on tiptoe to see as much of herself as possible in the small mirror.

"I feel like a fashion plate. How I do love pretty clothes! I suppose I ought to go around looking like a fright. Then I'd look like an artist. Most of the women who used to come to Jordan to give recitals were perfect scarecrows in their everyday clothes. We girls used to go to the station to see them leave. We wanted to get near them. Of course they didn't know. But it was always

such a disappointment to see them off the stage. I remember——”

“Now, Josie, don't you say another word. You run along for your walk. Sam never likes to be kept waiting. How would you like some of those pancakes you're so fond of for supper? The kind with strawberry jam between them.”

Josephine gave Aunt Mary a kiss. “I'd love them. And I'll be back in time to help. You're such a dear. Good-by!”

The walk from the Prescott home to Main Street led through the same dull neighborhoods, over the same uneven sidewalks, past the same indifferently kept lawns, and to the same ugly business section of frame and brick buildings that are characteristic of hundreds of small towns in the Middle West. Of late years, in Parksburg, numerous cheap box-like houses and cheaper box-like places of business had been built to keep pace with its growth. For there was the oil, which, after long tantalizing Parksburgers by erratic gushes in the outlying districts, had at last taken on signs of reliability by a steady, if somewhat reluctant flow. All but in the region of the Hatfield wells, where it showed an abiding generosity that set many a man dreaming at night he'd struck a gusher that started the whole country talking, and made Deacon Hatfield's thousands look like copper cents.

Parksburg boasted of the perfection of its oil as a mother boasts of the perfection of her first born. Parksburg oil, the world was given to understand, was the simon pure article and not like the adulterated product of a nearby vicinity that had to be purified at great expense before it could be marketed. The world did not respond to the suggestion that the best proposition before the business men of the day was to drill for oil round about Parksburg. But there was a sufficient number of venturesome ones in

going there with no one to look after you but that Miss Sothern. And right here I'll tell you I don't think much of her. She's too new-fangled. And she's sly. All she came here for was to get you away from us. And you're going, when you could stay right here where everybody knows you and can't do enough for you."

"But, Sam! My music!"

"So you think more of your music than you do of your Aunt Mary and the place you were born in and grew up in and where everybody loves you——. Oh, come now, Josie. Don't cry. I don't want to be mean about it. But it drives me crazy to think of your going 'way off there by yourself. Oh, I'm a brute! I've made you feel bad when I'd give up everything to make you happy. If it's going to make you happy to go to New York——" Sam's voice broke. "Then—go."

"I've got to go, Sam."

"Then nobody has a right to ask you to stay. There isn't much that anyone here can give you but just—love."

"I know—everybody's so good to me——"

Sam's eyes betrayed the desire he clenched his hands to suppress. His lips twitched. He took a swift step forward and bent over the drooping figure.

"Josie!"

She drew back close to the tree. This was not her friend! This was a man to fear! She covered her face with her hands.

Sam drew in a sharp breath. When he spoke the life had gone from his voice:

"No. You couldn't stay. There's nothing here to keep you. Let's go home. It's getting late."

And back they went along the river road, and across the Norris farm, and along the State road, toward the town. They spoke but little and then with constraint. As it grew dusk, the moisture of the falling dew brought out the

pungent odor of oil. To Josephine it meant—Parksburg—home. She fought to keep back the tears. Instinctively her hand crept within Sam's arm. But he gave no sign he knew it was there.

When they reached home, she seized his hand. "You've always been so good to me, Sam! The best friend I've ever had. Good-by."

"I'm not going to see you off, Josie," said he, gently, while he held her hand with a grip that hurt. "Remember when you're away that I'm the same Sam." He came closer.

She fled from him. At the door she turned and called, softly:

"Good-by, Sam! Good-by!"

CHAPTER IV

JOSEPHINE arrived in New York heavy-eyed, drooping, homesick.

But after the first day the homesickness was gone. The great city had won her.

"Why didn't you tell me how perfectly wonderful it is?" she wrote, reproachfully, to Sam. "It makes even Cleveland look sick." And to Aunt Mary she sent descriptions which, when read to Dr. Jewett, called forth the smiling comment:

"The united glories of ancient Babylon, Nineveh and Tyre, of Athens and of Rome, are as nothing to one who sees New York with the eyes of youth."

Sam's comment was: "Humph! Thought she went there to study music."

To Susie Hatfield she wrote that she simply adored Alice Sothern. Susie ought to see her when she was at home, lounging around in tea gowns. They were perfectly lovely. Not a bit like a kimono. And did she know that Miss Sothern's eyes were actually green? And as for her blond hair, well it was too beautiful for words when it was hanging down her back. She wasn't the least bit bony, although she did look so thin in that tailor suit she wore in Parksburg. And although she was so small, somehow, when she was around, you always noticed her. Not that she was the least bit conspicuous. But you just felt her.

Josephine had taken as a matter of course her exceptional good fortune in having a home with Alice Sothern, whose apartment was up near Columbia University. Knowing nothing of the cramped, hand-to-mouth existence of the average student from the provinces, she did not appreci-

ate what she had escaped. The artistic surroundings in which she found herself gave her a feeling of confused gratification. How bare the rooms seemed! Yet she liked them. How strange that a woman who lectured on pictures and painted some herself had so few about, and none of her own! But how many books! The sitting room—no—she must remember to call it the living room—just lined with them. She didn't like those dull old-looking rugs. She'd rather have a nice Brussels carpet.

With the installation of the rented baby grand, Josephine lost interest in New York. From a city of millions it became a city of one inhabitant. Brandt. Brandt, for whom she was to play the next week. Soon after her arrival she had sought out the house in Forty-fifth Street where he gave lessons and which was also his home. What a disappointment when she first saw the brown stone front that was exactly like all the other houses in the street. She had expected to see a large sign to inform the passing world that within was the studio of the great teacher who saw no one except by appointment. She had even expected the sign to state the terms charged by the Master. But she had found a forbidding looking house, with nothing to indicate that it harbored the city's most famous man. Nor did a sound of music come from it. That was the greatest disappointment of all.

She practiced each day, so long and with such fervor, preparing for the trial interview, that she grew pale and nervous. But neither the advice of Alice Sothern, nor the fatigue that diminished appetite and sleep, could stop her. The night before the interview was wakeful, except toward dawn, when she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. She awoke calm. Her forebodings of failure were forgotten. When, at last, the long-awaited hour came, she set out with a high heart.

She rang the bell with a firm hand. The big, red-faced,

foreign-looking woman who opened the door, barred the entrance.

"Good morning," said Josephine, brightly. "Is this where Professor Brandt lives?"

"Naw. There iss no professor here."

"I mean Mr. Brandt. I forgot he doesn't like to be called professor. He's expecting me. I'm the new pupil, Josephine Prescott."

The woman looked her over from head to foot. A withering look.

"So? The Master have not the name on his book."

"I—I mean," stammered Josephine, "that I'm to play for him for a trial."

"Vell, I dunno. You cum in. I tell the Master."

As Josephine stepped across the threshold, her heart quickened. She was in the home of the great Brandt! In obedience to a gesture with the thumb, from the woman, she seated herself on a bench that stood against the wall, and looked as if it had been used by countless waiting pupils. The woman knocked on a door that evidently led into the studio, waited a moment, then opened it and announced, loudly:

"Dot new younk lady to see you."

Josephine heard a hearty voice answer: "All right, Koubek. On the hour."

The woman closed the door and turned to Josephine. "Ven cums elefen of the clock, you knock. Ven he call, den you go in."

Without waiting for a reply she made her way laboriously up the stairway and disappeared.

Suddenly Josephine's courage deserted her. Behind that door was the great Brandt! She had heard his voice. In a little while she must play for him. What would he say to her? Oh, why had she come?

Somewhere in the house a clock began to strike. Jose-

phine counted on and on. Nine—ten—eleven. But she did not move. She was weak with terror. She would run away. She would give it all up and go back home.

Parksburg!

She forced her ebbing courage to the surface and, rising, went slowly to the door. She hesitated, breath suspended. Her knock was so timid there was no answer. Then, as if fearing to trust her courage longer, she knocked again, with more decision.

"Come in!"

She opened the door, slowly, and entered.

The man who rose and came toward her looked so much like the picture of Liszt over her piano at home that her fear of him increased. She leaned against the door, her face colorless.

Brandt's piercing gray eyes, that seemed to read her at a glance, grew sympathetic. Smiling, he extended his hand.

"You are Miss Prescott?"

"Yes." The firm yet gentle grasp of the long sinewy hand gave her courage.

"It makes me pleasure to see you," said Brandt, in English characterized by over-precision of accent. Still holding her hand, he led her over to the fire that burned cheerfully in the open grate. "Be seated, my dear young lady, here where it is warm. It comes a cold morning for October."

As Josephine took the large easy chair, her fear waned. Brandt seemed more the friend than the great Master, as he stood at the other side of the fireplace, an arm on the mantel. His voice was indulgent as he said:

"I have a letter about you from my friend, Borowski. It will make me pleasure to hear you play."

She leaned forward, eagerly. "It will be wonderful to play for you! I want to study to become a great pianist."

A faint expression of amusement passed over Brandt's face. "You have the large ambition."

"But music is all I've cared for, Professor—Mr. Brandt. It's everything to me!"

"How do you study before you make the course at the conservatory?"

"I've studied since I was seven. I was nineteen last June. So you see I've studied for twelve years."

"That comes not the point. I ask what teachers you have as a child."

"Only one. Professor Reicher of Parksburg."

"So? You have but a teacher in a little town?"

"But he was a wonderful teacher, Mr. Brandt. Professor Borowski knew all about him, and he told me that Professor Reicher, when he was young, was a pupil of Czerny. And he taught for a long time in Vienna. He died two years ago." The last traces of Josephine's embarrassment had vanished in championing this teacher of her childhood.

Brandt threw up his hands. "You mean not Adolph Reicher?"

"Yes, his name was Adolph."

"Adolph Reicher! I think him dead these twenty years."

"Oh, Mr. Brandt! Did you know him?"

"I know him? I know him well. He make the big reputation for himself in Vienna. A teacher of technic. Pupils come from far to study with him. But he make the dissipation too much. A little dissipation—well—all right. But more as little makes confusion with the nerves. Then he disappear. Pass some years and we think him dead. And now you tell me he live in your little town. How come he there?"

"He lived with his sister and her family."

"And he make a reasonable life?"

"Yes," said Josephine, falteringly. She would not be

disloyal to the man who had devoted his last years to giving her of his best. She would not tell how some of the women of Parksburg had tried to get Aunt Mary to take her away from "that old drunkard."

"Well, well. Well, well. A large pity that Reicher become so," said Brandt, running a hand through his hair. He looked at Josephine, sharply. "If you take notice of his instruction you have the commendable technic."

She flushed with pleasure. "When I went to Professor Varick at the college, he said he couldn't teach me anything more about technic."

Brandt shrugged his shoulders. "I know not of your Varick. I know only he make a foolish speech to say such to you. I have the remembrance Borowski write me you teach to help your study at the conservatory."

"Yes, Mr. Brandt. And now the people of my town have sent me here to study with you, that is, if you will take me."

"I see. It comes you are the protégée of your town. Your friends there, they have advanced you money?"

"They have given me money!" There was a thrill in Josephine's voice. "The Ladies of my church gave a benefit for me, and Deacon Hatfield, who's the richest man in town, doubled the amount taken in. They say that Parksburg's going to be prouder of me than of any gusher they'll ever strike."

"Any what?"

"Any gusher."

"Gusher? Gusher? Is not that—um—um—well, what it comes they call a young lady who talks all the time frivolous? How comes it then a gusher make a town to be proud?"

Josephine, now wholly at ease, laughed.

"Oh, Mr. Brandt, haven't you ever heard about the gushers in our part of the country? They're oil wells."

"So? But I have not the understanding. How comes a well to gush?"

"They do, some of them. You see, it's this way. When they're drilling for oil, sometimes, but not very often, they strike a big vein. Then the oil shoots way up in the air like a fountain. That's what they call a gusher. It runs all over the ground like a lake until it's controlled. But after it's controlled it becomes what they call productive, and the owner of the well makes a fortune in no time at all. Some gushers bring in as much as a thousand dollars a day."

"One thousand dollars a day coming from the earth that easy? It is not to believe!"

Josephine's eyes sparkled. "And sometimes more than a thousand dollars a day. When a big gusher is struck then the papers all over the country publish the news. And the people at home," she looked at Brandt, shyly, "they think I'm going to make Parksburg prouder than any gusher could make it."

"So? Well, that will take work. Your gusher comes sudden from the earth, a miracle. But to find fame through art! That is no miracle. That is sacrifice of all else but devotion to art."

"I would sacrifice everything, Mr. Brandt! And for always!"

"Tut! Tut! We shall see. You play for me, if you please."

Brandt led the way to the two pianos at the far end of the long narrow room, furnished in rare pieces that looked as if gathered from the four corners of the earth, yet blended into a subdued whole. A large mahogany desk littered with papers and bronze and ivory writing materials, stood between the fireplace and a revolving bookcase. The walls were bare, save for a painting of Beethoven and a tapestry.

But Josephine had eyes only for Brandt, who walked before her. Now that she could no longer see his face her fear returned. Tall, tending to portliness, the white hair brushed straight back from the forehead and falling over the collar of his black velvet coat, he was an impressive figure. If she failed to please him! If she failed!

As he reached the pianos, he turned to her.

"Play that which you choose."

The genial old man of a moment ago, had become the Master.

She slipped into the chair, trembling. Brandt left her and going to the desk took up a letter.

She rubbed her hands that had turned cold as ice. Brandt stood with his back to her. If he would only turn and speak just one encouraging word! She waited. He dropped the letter he was reading and took up another. She held her breath. He seemed like a man to whom she had never spoken. The minutes passed. He dropped the second letter and took out his watch, looked at it, and closed the case with a snap.

She must begin, now! As she struck the opening chords of the Liszt *Second Rhapsody*, her courage came back. She was going to play well! She was no longer cold. She was glowing with warmth.

"Stop!" called Brandt, turning quickly.

Josephine stared at him, her hands resting on the keys. He looked at her long before he said, in a calm voice:

"You think to make a show for me."

She sat rigid, silent. Brandt came to her slowly.

"You have not the understanding what I mean?"

She shook her head.

He made a sweeping motion, as though to brush something from him.

"Pst! I have not the desire to know how fast you can play. Or how loud. Or how soft. I have the desire to

know if you have the music here," pointing to his forehead. "You think the Rhapsody tells me if you are the musician? Pst! It is too stupid. I ask you, do you know Beethoven?"

"Yes, I know many Beethoven sonatas," answered Josephine, faintly.

Brandt threw himself into a chair and said, in a tone of resignation:

"The D major, Opus ten, first and second movements."

Josephine, her hands still on the keyboard, did not move. A mist was before her eyes. Brandt, silent, stared at the ceiling. "If I fail!" she thought. But she would not fail! She would show him that she could play!

The moment she began her confidence came back. She felt that she was playing the sonata better than she had ever played it, and she knew it as well as she knew her own name. She did not wait for a criticism between the movements, but passed from *Presto* to *Largo* with but a moment's pause.

At the close Brandt's only comment was, "You have much temperament. So?" Then he added, shortly, "A Chopin Etude."

As she finished the "Butterfly" *Etude*, Brandt got up and came to the piano. But he said nothing. He searched through some music, then placed a Mozart sonata before her, asking, "You know it?"

"Not this one," replied Josephine, her voice unsteady.

"Read it."

She went through the first two pages at full tempo and without a mistake. Brandt closed the book.

"Good reading. Bad Mozart."

She bit her lips to keep back the tears. Brandt looked at her, sharply.

"Tut! Tut! You need play no more. You have played quite sufficient." She trembled with apprehension. "You are foolish," he went on, deliberately, "to so have the

hysterics when you play. It brings but harm." He hesitated. "I think you have a talent. And you have a good technic. Reicher did well in that respect. You have the imagination. But," he shook his head, "you have not thought for the composer. You think only of how you feel. You are wild. You have no art. But you have a talent. Quite a big talent. Perhaps you come to learn how music is an art. I do not know. But perhaps it come that you develop. We shall see."

"Oh, Mr. Brandt, do you mean that you will teach me?" asked Josephine, her face aglow.

"For a little time, if it comes you are exactly in earnest."

"I'll do nothing but work day and night! Oh, Mr. Brandt, I——"

"Pst! Say nothing! I care not for the promises. I give you lessons, but only so long as I please. My secretary, she send you word of the time to begin. I now say good morning to you."

Josephine grasped the extended hand. It was on her lips to thank him, to tell him how happy she was, but the aloofness of his look held her back. With a murmured, "Good-by," she left the room.

That night she wrote to Aunt Mary:

This has been the most wonderful day of my life! Brandt has accepted me as a pupil! He says I have a big talent and lots of imagination, and he praised my technic. But he says I'm wild. I don't know just what he meant by that. And what do you think? He wouldn't let me play the Rhapsody for him. He said I was just trying to show off. I thought he was going to send me away right then and there. I nearly fainted I was so scared. He made me play Beethoven and Chopin and read some Mozart and that was all I played for him although I had a whole program ready. I was expecting to play the Pathétique but he made me play that D major that I've played since I was twelve. But no matter. I'm going to study with him. The great Brandt!

Oh, Aunt Mary, he's a perfect dear. As soon as I was in the studio he made me feel as if I had always known him. But I was awfully afraid of him when he asked me to play. For then he was different—dreadfully stern and cold. He's got a housekeeper who's a perfect ogre. I thought she was never going to let me in. Her name is Mrs. Koubek. Miss Sothern says all the pupils call her The Koubek.

And just think, Aunt Mary, Mr. Brandt used to know Professor Reicher in Vienna and says he was a famous teacher then. But he says that he was awfully dissipated. Don't you dare tell that to a soul in Parksburg. Especially those women who used to act so mean about him. I didn't say a word about those sprees he used to go on. I wouldn't give him away for the world!

I'm too excited to write another word. I'm going to practice every single minute until my first lesson.

Good night, dear Aunt Mary. Hugs and kisses (bushels of them) from

Your happy,

JOSIE.

P.S.—I told him about the gushers in our part of the country and he thought I was talking about girls who gush!!

P.P.S.—He had on a black velvet coat.

CHAPTER V

"You teach dot young lady like she vass shust beginnink to blay," said The Koubek, as she served Brandt his lunch one day, directly after he had given Josephine a lesson.

Brandt kept his eyes on the book propped up before him on the table, and said nothing.

"It cums many years since you take a so stupid pupil," was The Koubek's next shaft. And still Brandt kept his eyes on his book as if he had not heard.

The Koubek laughed, maliciously. "I knows vy you troubles mit her. She iss young andt pretty. Dot iss like it cums ven mans get oldt. Dey go veak over pretty faces andt big eyes."

Brandt poured himself a glass of wine and set the bottle down with a thump.

"Pst! You come the nuisance. Always making the disturbance when I have the desire to read."

"Andt you teach her cheap," went on The Koubek, unperturbed. "I see it in dot book mit mine own eyes."

Brandt turned a leaf of *Cousin Pons*, and began to read aloud in his guttural French. The Koubek, her thick lips pursed, her small eyes half closed, served him generously with salad, then went to the kitchen for coffee. If Brandt had looked at her as she left the room he would have known she was saving her last shaft for the auspicious moment. But he did not raise his eyes from the volume before him.

The Koubek was in no awe of the Master. She ran his house, kept his clothes in order, cooked for him, and even demanded that Martha Spencer, who came daily to look after his mail and keep his accounts with his pupils, should

with him, although urged to do so. She took obdurate pleasure in letting him know she felt it a duty to stay as a guardian of the house which he had rented behind her back. So she spent the summers alone, plodding heavily about, keeping everything in as perfect order as if the Master were likely to appear at any hour.

She had insisted, as soon as they were settled in the new house, that he speak nothing but English to her. She must know it "better as I knew it in Vienna, that I be not cheated by the market," was her explanation. This did not deceive Brandt. He knew she wanted to learn English to exercise authority over his pupils, just as in Vienna she had absorbed with surprising ease a conversational understanding of many tongues. At first he was refractory. "It comes a nuisance to speak the English," he expostulated. But The Koubek won her point by turning suddenly deaf whenever he spoke to her in any language but the language of his American pupils. He tried to break her by saying the opposite of what he meant, a custom that brought many a disaster upon her. But when she took to turning these disasters so that they brought inconvenience and discomfort to him, he gave in completely. And it was not long before The Koubek knew how each pupil stood with the Master.

She had her own opinions about the pupils, too, and never failed to let them know how they stood with her. Those in her disfavor were the constant victims of her neglect. But those who pleased her (and a pupil who pleased The Koubek meant a pupil she felt would do honor to the Master's teaching) were the subjects of her untiring devotion.

Among the outcasts was Josephine. It outraged The Koubek's sense of pride in the Master that he should take so immature a pupil, just at a time when he had closed his studio to all but the few of great promise. Even the

weekly musicales where the pupils met and played for one another, with perhaps outsiders present, too, had been given up. "Now that I come to be old," Brandt had said, "I will have that trouble no longer."

Only The Koubek knew that more than one young artist who played in New York with big success had come to the Master afterward for criticism of his performance. Was there not such a one here but yesterday? One who had played last week with that Philharmonic orchestra? And now, today, he gave of his time to a silly pupil from the country.

The Koubek, in the kitchen, growled as she poured a little of the coffee from the pot, and sampled it to see if it was exactly to the Master's taste. But when she entered the dining room, cup in hand, she was smiling. At the sound of the opening door, Brandt, who had been lost in thought, hastily applied himself again to the book. The Koubek set the cup before him and watched him as he drank the coffee, his face telling her that it was just as he wanted it, black and thick and hot.

"Vhat you tink dot younk lady say to me last week?" she asked, amiably.

Brandt gave no heed.

"She cum out the studio vhen I dust in the hall, andt she say to me, so eggzited like, 'Oh, Mrs. Koubek, I haf had so vonderful a lesson! Mr. Brandt, he iss so goot to me! Haf you efer noticed, Mrs. Koubek, how much he look like the great Liszt?'"

"Pst!"

The Koubek knew that the greatest annoyance of the Master's life was his resemblance to Liszt. There had been a time when his pupils, behind his back, referred to him as, "L'Abbé." One pupil, thinking to please him, had told him of the sobriquet. Brandt's rage, ending in throwing a book at the offender, was a standing anecdote.

The Koubek, still amiable, went on: "I say to the younk lady, 'So? You tink my Master look like Liszt? Vell, I tells you, dot Liszt, he vass nobody to compare mit my Master!'"

Brandt sprang from his chair.

"I no longer have you in my house, if you say such nonsense as you say to the young lady. You make me to seem a fool. Have I not told you one thousand times that Liszt was a great man? So great that I was but his humble pupil?"

The Koubek folded her arms and pursed her lips.

"Vy den you scoldt dot younk lady ven she cum here dot first time andt blay dot Rhapsodie?"

"Pst! That Rhapsodie! It is all right, but it is not the great Liszt. It is not the music to show the musician. Now you listen." Brandt came close to The Koubek, pointing an admonishing finger. "It is an enormous impudence that you say Liszt was not to compare with me."

"Vell, I tink vhat I tink andt I speak vhat I speak."

"Pst! We shall see!"

Brandt rushed from the room, banging the door after him. The Koubek heard him taking coat and hat from the closet in the hall. She opened the door just as he was leaving the house.

"Vere you goink?" she demanded, reaching the street door before him and standing with her back against it.

"I go to hear Ysaye play. He comes to America last week. Today he make his first concert."

"So? Dot iss fine! Andt you go mit diss," throwing open Brandt's fur-lined overcoat and revealing the black velvet coat beneath. "Dot iss like it vill cum vhen I no longer am here. Andt your hair. Dot vass not combed. You go make yourself nice."

And up the stairs went Brandt, like an abashed child.

When he came down he was transformed. The Koubek watched him through a crack in the door until he disappeared up the street.

"Dot Liszt! He vass shust nobody to compare mit my Master," she murmured, her eyes moistening.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Josephine learned that Alice Sothern was at home to her friends the second Sunday in each month, she was shocked. Parties on Sunday! She demurred about appearing at the first one. When she ventured to give her reason, Alice dismissed the subject with:

"I'd forgotten there are still people in the world who think it wrong to entertain anyone on Sunday who isn't a relative."

It was Alice's habit to sweep aside Josephine's provincial conventions in this fashion, without argument. Josephine stifled her conscience and "assisted" at the first tea because she feared to offend. After it was over, and she had taken off the white summer frock Alice had persuaded her to wear, but which had made her feel all the more that she was at a party, she sat down to think about it. She'd had a lovely time, although the people were so different from any she'd ever met before. And as for Sunday parties, well, what about the Sunday suppers she had helped Aunt Mary get for relatives near and distant no end of times? It had been hard work to prepare every one of them. Cold meat or fried chicken, hot biscuits—always—and creamed potatoes and sauces and cake. And the dishes afterward! She and Aunt Mary had both always gone to bed tired to death. But there was no work to speak of about this party of Miss Sothern's. Just tea and sandwiches (those toasted ones made right at the table were simply delicious!), and little cakes and some candies; why, it wasn't like a party at all! That is, the refreshments weren't. But Miss Sothern, in that lovely gown, looked as if it was a big party. And most of the other women

looked that way, too. Some of the people were awfully gay, too gay for Sunday. But that was probably because they were New Yorkers.

No, it hadn't been a bit of work. If breaking the Sabbath meant doing a lot of work, then she'd broken it many times before coming to New York. But Aunt Mary would have been shocked if she'd seen her this afternoon in that gay crowd. Yet she wouldn't have been shocked if those people had been relatives. Why, Aunt Mary wouldn't even think of entertaining the Ladies' Aid for supper on Sunday night.

Josephine laughed. Imagine the Ladies' Aid dressing up in their best, and coming to Aunt Mary's for Sunday night supper! Yet what difference would it make whether Aunt Mary entertained the Ladies' Aid or her relatives? And she cared a lot more for some of the Ladies' Aid than she did for her relatives.

Probably Miss Sothern was right.

So the second tea found Josephine more at ease with her conscience. The third found her almost freed from her scruples. She assured herself these teas were good for her: for they took her mind off her work. They were the only real social times she had. Not but what she could have more good times if she wanted to. Miss Sothern's friends had been so kind about inviting her. But she wasn't going to begin on that sort of thing, for if she did she'd get all tired out, and then her music would suffer. And, anyway, she didn't really care so very much for these friends of Miss Sothern's. Yet it was nice to know them.

Josephine was too unaffected to feel ill at ease among these people, although their talk was often of subjects and persons she knew nothing about. And they found her charming: for she brought to these disillusioned men and women a freshness and enthusiasm that had their own

appeal. Then there was her beauty, of a fineness that showed no trace of the provincial.

"She's so lovely I like to sit here and just look at her," said Eleanor Morris, who earned what her friends considered immense sums as an interior decorator. It was the Sunday of the third tea, and she was talking to Stillman Holbrooke, the painter the experimentalists had dubbed "Static Holbrooke," but who had recently been referred to by a critic as "the man who paints so little he always paints well." With the critical deliberation of the artist, Holbrooke looked at Josephine, who was in animated conversation with a slender dark-haired young man.

"She should be a violinist instead of a pianist," said he.

"A violinist? Explain."

"She has such possibilities as a violinist. The long lithe line from head to ankle; the soft dark hair and the small pale face and full red mouth. There is too much animation about her, much as if she were ready to seize a blazing torch and proclaim a victory, but that could be overcome by the painter. Posed in shadow, you know—like Whistler's *Sarasatè*."

"Always seeing through your own medium!"

"I repeat that, to look upon, she should be a violinist."

"But to hear?"

Holbrooke stroked his Vandyke beard, which, like his hair, was streaked with gray. "My opinion regarding Miss Prescott's playing can have little value; for I'm a classicist, and she seems to incline strongly toward the opposite school."

"That's what I call an evasive, yet scathing, criticism. But I don't agree with you. She thrilled me the one time I heard her play—it was the same time that you heard her, here, some three weeks ago. What a contradiction she is! So naïve, yet, judging from her playing, full of emotion. She must have much promise, or Brandt wouldn't

take her. She told me he was angry when he heard she had played for us, and said that if she kept that up he would be done with her for good and all. So there's no possibility at present of our hearing her again."

"I should hope not," interrupted a striking red-haired woman who looked her forty years, and who earned her living writing iconoclastic criticisms of drama and art. "I should hope not. I never heard more inartistic playing. Oh, yes, I grant she has emotional gifts; but, I assure you, many obscure musicians and actors would be riding on the top wave of success today if raw emotion could float them. I prophesy that girl will die young as an artist, and live to a ripe old age as a wife."

Whereupon the red-haired woman, who wrote under the nom-de-plume of Eugénie Fragonard, and likewise used the name socially in preference to her real one of Harriet Jenkins, made her way to Josephine, who was still talking to the dark-haired young man.

"Well, well, my dear, you grow more charming every day." Then to the young man, "Are you giving Miss Prescott the scenario of your latest masterpiece?"

Hamilton Carlton, ignoring this shaft at his ambition to become a dramatist, greeted her formally.

"We were talking about the French novelists," said Josephine.

"On which subject Mr. Carlton is a recognized authority." Miss Fragonard's tone robbed the comment of its sarcasm. "Don't let him persuade you to read them. Where ignorance is innocence, you know——" She laughed, good-humoredly.

Josephine looked uneasy. "He was talking about Balzac. I've never read anything of his."

"You have still in store the experience of reading Balzac for the first time? Fortunate child! But wait until you can appreciate his philosophy. To read him for the story

alone! Sacrilege! Carlton, why haven't you offered to bring me some tea?"

"You humiliate me! I hasten!"

"He's a charming fellow," said Miss Fragonard, her eyes on the young man. "He's going to do something one of these days."

"He knows about so many things," replied Josephine.

Miss Fragonard laughed. "My dear, all young men know about many things. Ah, here he comes, and carrying tea and sandwiches. Carlton, you should be called Mercury of the Winged Heel."

"I wish Balzac could have been a dramatist," said Carlton, as if there had been no interruption to the conversation.

"Balzac a dramatist? Spoil a novelist to make a playwright? An abomination!"

And Miss Fragonard, the cup of tea in one hand, a sandwich in the other, and with her green gown trailing after her, started on a tour of the rooms.

"A clever woman." Carlton's emphasis of the adjective would have indicated criticism to a more experienced person than Josephine.

As it was, her reply came with enthusiasm: "It must be wonderful to be clever."

"Cleverness is the most flagrant vice of the day." Carlton delivered the opinion in a tone of authority.

The next moment Alice Sothern, with the ease of a skilled hostess, had carried Carlton off to a girl in whom he had no interest, and left in his place a man with grave eyes and a kind smile, whom she introduced as Mr. Stanhope, adding, "You remember, Josephine, my telling you about my old friend, Winthrop Stanhope."

Josephine remembered so completely that she became self-conscious. This was the man who had written the novel everyone was talking about and called a masterpiece of realism. She hadn't read the novel, and didn't even know

what was meant by realism. How could she talk to him?

But in a moment she was at ease, more so, indeed, than she had been with young Carlton. Stanhope, in spite of his somber eyes and mature years, talked frivolities as if he had never known a serious thought. Soon the two were sitting in the window seat, sipping orange pekoe. Josephine was telling how and why she had come to New York, and about the great man who had taken her for his pupil. Stanhope showed far more interest in the account of Parksburg and the benefit concert and Deacon Hatfield than in Brandt. His adroit questions drew from her a description of her home, of Aunt Mary, of Dr. Jewett, and even of Sam Sterling.

"You see, I've known Sam all my life," she explained, "and so he feels he can give me a lot of advice. He thought I was dreadfully foolish to come to New York."

"Indeed! And what did he want you to do?"

Josephine blushed. Stanhope raised his eyebrows. "Ah-ha! So that's the way the wind blows? Well, why shouldn't young Samuel come to New York, too?"

"Sam live in New York? I simply couldn't imagine such a thing. He thinks it's dreadful to be in a town so big he can't know everybody."

Thought Stanhope: "Evidently wants to be the big frog in a small puddle." What he said aloud was: "When you give your first concert Sam will have to come and hear you or I shall be no friend of his."

Josephine looked at him gravely. He sat with his teacup balanced precariously on his knee, and gave earnest attention to the plate of cake on a near-by muffin stand. A thick lock of brown hair hung over his forehead. When he smiled he showed even white teeth.

"Tell me more about Parksburg," said he, taking a macaroon from the plate.

Josephine made no reply. She was thinking how silly a man looked drinking tea and eating cake in the afternoon. She couldn't imagine Sam Sterling doing such a thing. There really wasn't a man in the room who seemed as much of a real man as Sam. As for the women, they certainly were freaky. And not one of them, with the exception of Miss Sothern, cared for her, and even Miss Sothern's feeling wasn't like that of the people at home.

"Why so silent?"

Josephine started at the sound of Stanhope's voice. She tried to smile, and failed. He looked at her so kindly, she leaned toward him and whispered:

"I'm homesick."

"You have a right to be," said Stanhope, cheerfully. "I should be as homesick as the deuce if I had left an Aunt Mary, and such friends as Sam and Deacon Hatfield and a Ladies' Aid Society, in a town like Parksburg. I'd like to go out there sometime and get material for a story."

"How funny! I couldn't imagine anyone writing a story about Parksburg!"

A girl in a red hat set rakishly to the side of a tousled blond head came abruptly up to Josephine.

"I hear you're studying with Brandt." She seated herself on the edge of the window seat. "Do move over, Winthrop. You always have wanted the earth. There, that's better." Then, to Josephine: "Isn't Brandt the worst crank you ever knew? You think he's lovely? Well, I certainly must tell that to a friend of mine who studies with him. Hastings—perhaps you've met him—a short, blond fellow with broad shoulders and heavy face. His mother's a Pole, and his father's an American who made a fortune selling something or other—I forget what—to Russia. Hastings plays Chopin marvelously; not a bit of sentimentality, but lots of sentiment and fire and passion. Most artistic, too. You must meet him.—No, thank God,

I'm not a musician. My name is Georgette Randolph. I do illustrating. But I live with a musician—a violinist, Grace Mandeville.—Is she famous? Lord, no! She expected to be, like a lot of others. But now she's glad to get any sort of engagements, no matter how small. That would kill me off in no time. But Grace says she'd rather do it than teach. How are you expecting to use your music?"

"I? Well, I'm just studying now, that's all. I'm not sure what I'll do."

Josephine had ceased to proclaim that she aspired to be a great pianist. Her faith in herself remained unshaken, but it had not taken her long to understand what was meant by the look that invariably came to the faces of those to whom, in her first days in New York, she confidently announced her ambition.

Miss Randolph shrugged her shoulders. "You're welcome to all you get from it, so far as I'm concerned. In my opinion, being a musician is a dog's life. When Grace isn't playing in public, she's practicing. She has to keep at it all the time, day in and day out, year after year, and it will be that way as long as she's in the profession. A dog's life, I say. Now there's Winthrop"—with a gesture toward the silent man who looked bored—"he writes a novel, and that's the end of it, for the one effort is good as long as the public will stand for it. But to play in public means keeping at a thing even after you know it so well you can play it backward. None of that for me. By the way, I'd like you to meet Grace. I'll arrange it sometime. We live way down in the Thirties. Awfully shabby place. But convenient. My word! Everybody's going! Winthrop, do come and walk over to the L with me. I despise walking alone."

And the voluble Miss Randolph departed in company with the plainly reluctant Stanhope, who, before he was dragged off, managed to say to Josephine:

"I hope I shall see you again, soon. We must finish that talk we were having."

And at this moment Alice Sothern was saying to Stillman Holbrooke, "You have not yet told me how you like my protégée." To which Holbrooke replied:

"She is charming to look upon. I should like to paint her."

"A compliment with a sting."

"Not at all. I have not talked with her. You know how I feel about that sort of thing. I have had such pleasure in looking at her that I don't want to risk disappointment by knowing her."

"I might have known you would say that. How much you miss in life by not wanting to know people intimately."

"How much I gain by preserving my illusions!"

"A sad comment on human nature!" With this reply, Alice dismissed a subject which generally came up when she and Holbrooke were together, and always left her with the feeling that, just as Holbrooke avoided knowing anyone intimately, so did he make it impossible for anyone to know him well.

After the last guest had gone, Josephine threw herself on the couch. What a good time she had had! But the excitement tired her. For it was so exciting to meet so many new people, and some of them famous, too. How nice Mr. Stanhope had been to her! It was perfectly thrilling to meet a man who had written a great novel. And Mr. Holbrooke painted pictures! She didn't like him, he was so stiff and formal. But it was wonderful to be in the same room with such a man. And that Mr. Carlton was so nice. He was going to be famous, too, some day. He was writing a play now. She actually knew a man who could write a play! And there was that funny-looking little man who didn't talk much to anybody. She couldn't even remember his name. Miss Fragonard had said he lost

his living writing poetry. Miss Fragonard was always saying things like that. She was terribly clever. But she looked awfully fast. Still, you couldn't help liking her.

But some of the women smoked cigarettes! She could never, never get used to that. She hated it. It was perfectly horrid. She was glad Miss Sothern didn't smoke.

She would write and tell Aunt Mary everything that had happened this afternoon, except about the cigarettes. Wouldn't she be proud to think her Josie knew so many famous people! What was Aunt Mary doing tonight?

Why, this was Sunday! And she'd forgotten!

She'd never spent her Sundays in Parksburg as she was spending them in New York. She always went to church and Sunday school. It was nice the way some of the young people nearly always stopped at her house after church in the evening. They generally ended by gathering about the piano to sing hymns. Aunt Mary must miss that. Since she'd come to New York they'd been going to Susie Hatfield's. Susie was always writing about it. Sam went, too. Susie just raved over his bass voice. They'd probably be at her house tonight.

Josephine sighed with homesickness.

How she'd love to see them all! And what fun it would be to tell them about the people she'd met today. Not one of them had ever met a really famous person. Well, if she'd been satisfied to settle down at home, she'd be just like all the other young people there.

She smiled, tolerantly.

CHAPTER VII

"You must wait a while. My Master is busy," said The Koubek as she admitted Josephine one morning early in February.

"Very well," replied Josephine, indifferently. She removed her coat and hat, and, seating herself on the bench, leaned wearily against the wall. She was pale. There were dark circles under her eyes. The corners of her mouth drooped.

The Koubek looked at her sharply as she passed on the way to the basement. Soon she reappeared with a steaming cup of coffee, which she placed on the bench.

"You drink dot. My Master cannot be made trouble by the weak pupils."

Without noticing Josephine's "Thank you!" she again made her way to the basement, muttering as she went down the stairs:

"Always day becomes sick when day begins to know anything."

The coffee brought life to Josephine's eyes. But she still leaned wearily against the wall. She was so tired! And so discouraged! What was all her work amounting to? Nothing, if she was to judge from Brandt's criticisms. And she'd never in all her life worked as she'd worked for him. Beside her piano lessons, there was her harmony, with that horrid Mr. Tomek, Brandt had sent her to. Yesterday he'd torn her exercises to bits and thrown them on the floor, shouting she was nothing but a musical gosling. And the whole class had laughed. She'd never go back to him if it weren't for Brandt. But he would be furious if she even complained of Tomek. He seemed to

think her harmony lessons were just as necessary as her lessons with him. He'd told her she could never play a composition well until she knew how it was formed technically; or learn how to use the pedal until she knew harmony much better than she knew it now. He'd even said he wouldn't have taken her for a pupil if he'd known she was so ignorant of harmony. And when she told him she'd studied it at Jordan he'd said, "Pst!" How she hated that "Pst!" He was always saying it.

Her fingers began to thrum on the bench the rhythm of a passage in a sonata. No, that was too fast. She was always playing too fast or too slow. She never could play evenly enough to suit Brandt. Over and over she thrummed the passage with nervous energy.

Suddenly from the studio came the sound of a piano. The *Revolutionary Etude*! It must be Brandt! No pupil could play it like that.

She listened, breathlessly. At the end she heard Brandt's hearty "Bravo!"

So it was a pupil, after all! What would she not give to hear Brandt call "Bravo!" after she had played! As it was, he grew more and more dissatisfied with each lesson, and she played, she knew, worse and worse. After the last lesson she had cried herself sick. And before she had come to New York music had seemed so easy to learn, and her playing had always made her so happy!

The studio door opened, and a short blond young man with heavy shoulders and face, came out, followed by Brandt. It flashed into Josephine's mind that this must be the pupil Georgette Randolph had told her about, Hastings, who played Chopin so wonderfully.

Brandt put an arm about the young man's shoulders. "You are one of the joys of all my life."

"Glad you're satisfied."

"Au 'voir. You come again Friday."

"Friday," repeated the young man. He drew on his coat and fur gloves. "Damned windy today. Good-by."

The young man gone, Brandt turned his attention to Josephine. His manner changed.

"Good morning. Enter. I am ready."

She passed into the studio. As Brandt followed her she heard him mutter, "I love him for his playing." He sank into an easy chair. "We now make the lesson."

As Josephine seated herself at the piano, she bit her lip to keep back the tears. He did not want to hear her play!

She began a Bach *Invention*. Before she had gone a dozen measures, Brandt's "Steady, steady!" told her she was playing badly.

She blundered on, confusing the themes, blurring the phrasing.

Brandt sprang from his chair. "Pst! You play worse comes each lesson. What means it?" He came close to her. "Ach! I see! You are like the so many others. You want to become the pianist, and you spend all your time making pleasure. You have the pale cheeks and the weary eyes. I see. It is that you have some lover who takes of your time."

"No, no, Mr. Brandt!"

"Say nothing! Have I not experience in such pupils? They come to me with a talent, some a so-so talent and one, in a long time, with a fine talent. And they tell me of how wonderful they will work. They say, 'Oh, Mr. Brandt, I love only music! I love it alone!' In no time they meet some young man, and then what come they to love? Yes, I ask you, what come they to love? It is all right, it is a desirableness, to love, if it stop not the work. But when it stop the work, it is a frivolity. Tell me not that I speak wrong! Have I not seen you with that man who writes the novels? Yesterday I saw you come from out

the museum when I was making my afternoon walk. Then you come and play like the abomination. I say to you I will have none of it!"

"But, Mr. Brandt, you are mistaken," protested Josephine. "There is no one who cares for me in that way." She hesitated. "That is, not anyone here. Mr. Stanhope is just my friend, and he has been kind to me. He gives me books to read, and often takes me to the museum and explains the pictures and other things. But he never interferes with my music. I practice six hours a day, and work at my harmony too."

"Six hours! You practice too much! That makes the trouble with you. If I have not told you that so much practice makes the nerves to grow weak, you should have sense to know it of yourself. Four hours, when you practice with your head the same as your fingers, is sufficient."

"Yes, Mr. Brandt, you have told me that. But I get so discouraged, and feel that I play so badly, I want to practice all the time. When I'm away from the piano I'm unhappy. Oh, it's so hard, Mr. Brandt! I used to find my music easy, and I loved it. But it takes so long now to learn anything, and there's nothing, just nothing, I can play well."

And Josephine burst into tears.

Brandt stood in the curve of the piano, his arms folded. He smiled, coldly.

"Well," said he, "I make the confession I have not sufficient understanding to teach so ambitious a pupil as yourself."

Josephine looked up. "What do you mean?" she asked, tremblingly.

Brandt shrugged his shoulders. "I mean as I say. I know not how to teach you."

She stared at him without speaking.

"I have never learned how to make the artist to grow

quickly," he went on, with exaggerated courtesy. "That is your ambition, yes? To grow quickly. Well, I have never learned how to turn artists forth from my studio as the machine turns forth its production. Many teachers have learned this. I have been too stupid to acquire this so desired ability. You think when you come to me that I possess it. But I possess it not. I make you the apology."

Josephine shrank back in her chair. His words cut like a lash.

Brandt strode over to her side. "You want to become the artist quickly. Well, I tell you it is not to be possible. You have been here some few months and you have the discouragement. It makes me to laugh. I have the understanding how it is. Now you listen and I will tell you. Always you have the talent. You play easy, for you have the hand that makes technic come quick. You have what you call the magnetism. You feel much within that you cannot speak. So you try to speak it when you play. But you control it not at all. You play now beautiful, now impossible. You have not the control of your talent. It is the control of the talent that makes the artist."

Brandt began to walk about the room, one moment with hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, the next moment running them through his long white hair, again gesticulating violently. He talked to the ceiling, to the walls, and, now and then, directly to Josephine.

"I will explain. There have come to the public many times pianists and violinists who are but children. They play wonderful. It is not to believe how they play. The people who hear such a child say when he is grown he will have the world at his knee. No, it is that you say at his foot. Well, what comes to happen? Do all the so wonderful children grow to be the artists? Pst! Not one in the great many. And why? Now you listen and

I will tell you. They learn not the control of their talent. All the time the talent grows it must be controlled. The artist knows always what he is about. You have never known that. Not once in all your life. If you learn that, then it may perhaps come that you are the artist. If you learn it not, well,—” Brandt shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. Then he laughed.

“It makes me amusement that you say you now have the discouragement. You have years to work hard before you become the pianist. I see how it is. You think you can come to be the artist as easy-like as the oil comes from the earth. What you call it the way it comes? A rusher? Ach! I have the remembrance. A gusher. It is exactly so you play. You gush—Blm-m-m-m!” Brandt waved his hands above his head. “And then you spread all over and it means nothing! Ach! What said you to me about the gusher? It is productive not until it is controlled? You are now in your playing just as a gusher that spreads all over. But some day—well, we shall see. It is for me to help you to control your talent. But I cannot do it of myself. You must come to see the truth with your mind. That will take years. But if you come to reach that high, then your talent will be beautiful. But I do not know. It is yet too soon for me to understand what you perhaps will become.”

Josephine sat in such an attitude of despair that Brandt grew gentle. He came again to her side.

“Perhaps there comes the discouragement because you begin to learn. What is it you say in America? Such as know nothing, fear nothing? Perhaps now you begin to know, and so comes to you the fear. If that is why you play not well, I say it comes a good sign. Now you go home and you practice not but four hours each day. I have no wish to hear your lesson today. You have not the state of mind to play it. You have the hysterics. It was so

with that young man who played for me the Chopin this morning. He was once all crazy-like. But now he comes to be the artist. He has been my pupil since nine years. Comes nine years perhaps you play with art. I do not know. We shall see. And now we make an end to the lesson."

Brandt seated himself at his desk. Slowly Josephine left the room, closing the door after her, and blindly made her way to the bench.

Nine years! Nine years!

The words beat in her brain like a sentence of death.

Nine years!

The Koubek's heavy steps sounded on the stairs. Josephine started to her feet, hurriedly put on hat and coat, and, snatching her muff and music case from the bench, fled from the house.

Although a bitter wind was blowing, she was burning with a heat that suffocated. She opened her coat. Her breath came in gasps.

Why, what did he mean? That she, Josephine Prescott, who had graduated from Jordan and had come to him to be finished, must study nine years? Yes, that was what he meant. He had said it. And he had said "perhaps" then she would be an artist. Perhaps!

Why had she ever come to him? Why hadn't she gone to a teacher who would encourage her? She had always been encouraged. In Parksburg——

Parksburg!

She stood still, her eyes dilated. In a last hot flame the heat that suffocated her went out. She shivered and drew her coat close about her.

Parksburg!

She started forward, hurriedly, as if to escape from something she feared.

What would Parksburg say? Parksburg, that had thought

two years more than was necessary to finish her studies! That had given her the money.

The money! Twelve hundred dollars. Why, it would not be nearly enough even for two years. What was she to do? What was she to do?

She began to cry, holding her muff to her face. It was the noon hour, and the sidewalks were thronged. She made her way through the crowds, unheeding the curious glances directed toward her.

How could Brandt treat her so? He was cruel! She hated him. Yes, she hated him with her whole soul. She wished she had never seen him. And how did he know what she could do? She'd only been with him a little over three months. She'd never yet been able to play for him as she knew she could play when she wasn't frightened. He always frightened her.

She stopped crying and closed her lips tight. She was Josephine Prescott, who had played for years and years and made everybody who heard her love music. She would show him he was mistaken. He hadn't taught her long enough to understand her. If she worked tremendously, she could surprise him by her progress. But even if she made wonderful progress and finished in half the time he expected, that would still mean four years more.

But there must be a quicker way for those who were truly gifted. She had never learned anything by plodding. That Mr. Hastings might be different. Because it took him nine years, why should Brandt think it would take her that long?

Her spirits rose a little. Then they fell. If she had only herself to think about, she would go on, some way. But there was Parksburg!

When she reached the apartment her face was white and drawn. She stood outside the door, dreading to enter. She did not want to see even Alice Sothern now.

She heard the insistent ringing of the telephone. So Alice was not there! She unlocked the door with a trembling hand.

When she entered the room the telephone was still ringing. She took down the receiver and heard Winthrop Stanhope's voice. He had seats for the opera that evening. *Tristan*, with a big cast. Would she go?

Her face brightened. Yes, she would go. It would be lovely. It was so good of him to ask her. She had never been to the Metropolitan.

She hung up the receiver.

The Metropolitan! How she had longed to go!

Tristan! She had been wild to hear the opera ever since she had played the score for that woman who lectured at Jordan. It was the most thrilling music in the world! Tonight she was to hear it! And at the Metropolitan, with a big cast! It seemed too good to be true!

She stood, her face flushed, her eyes unnaturally bright. She laughed, excitedly.

The Liebestod! She had dreamed of hearing it sung. She had played it for years. She must play it now!

She searched eagerly for the music, and when she found it placed it on the piano rack and sat for a moment looking at it with glowing eyes.

Then she began to play. And as she played the last trace of her resentful despondency was consumed by her feverish rapture.

CHAPTER VIII

WHILE reading his mail, Stanhope had come across an envelope containing two subscription seats for the opera that evening and a slip of paper on which was scrawled:

Hope you can use them. No Wagner heroics for me. Went to Tristan once. Had to finish the night at Rector's.

Yours,

JACK.

Stanhope had reached for the telephone and called up Josephine. When he hung up the receiver he asked himself; now why had he done that?

Why had he asked this girl to go to the opera with him, when he seldom found among his most congenial friends a companion with whom he could endure listening to music? This girl who didn't know as much about opera as his man Achille. Achille, who, while he served an omelette cooked to perfection, could talk intelligently about the singers he had heard the night before from the top gallery of the Metropolitan. Why had he done this thing, impulsively—he who had grown deliberate in all his desires and actions?

He lighted a cigar and leaned back in his chair.

Well, he was glad he had done it, even if his enjoyment of the opera was spoiled. He would like to see what effect this great music drama had on her. It was interesting to study the provincial under such conditions. The subject had been worked to death by writers. Still, there was always something new to be discovered, some original angle from which to draw conclusions.

She was rather fascinating. No, he would say charming. She lacked the coquetry inseparable from fascination.

But her charm was the naïve charm of the provincial. Perhaps that was why he had been attracted to her. He had seldom met the type. It had long been extinct in New York. As for Boston——

Stanhope smiled.

Josephine in Boston would be as out of place as a sweetly flavored romance in his father's austere library.

His father! He could see him in that library now. A delicate white-haired man, with blue veins showing through the pallid skin of hands and forehead, to whom the Back Bay was the one oasis in a vulgar world, and who never called New York by any name but Gotham. . . . If his mother had lived, would she have clung to tradition as his father had done? Quite likely. How often he had tried to recall even a faint recollection of her. But he was so young when she died that no impress of her personality had been left on his childish mind. Was she like her portrait that, for nearly forty years, had hung over the library mantelpiece? If so, then he would have proved as great a disappointment to her as he had proved to his father. No doubt she expected the ample inheritance she had left him to be used in perpetuating, unblemished, the name of Stanhope. And what had he done for the name? Nothing, in his father's opinion, but tarnish it through his indifference to the Back Bay and all it stood for. . . . A sad record for the only child of the last of the Stanhopes!

How he had loafed through Harvard! And to this day he was not able to understand how he happened to get a diploma. Other Stanhopes, one and all, had come through with honors. He was among those who got through by the skin of their teeth. This had meant nothing to him. But it had meant everything to his father.

And afterward he had loafed about the house, reading, playing on the grand piano—abominably, but he didn't know it then—and writing worthless verse. Those were

the days when he longed to take up music as a profession. It was so like his father to have asked, cuttingly, if he could name him a musician who was born a gentleman. And his reply, no, not according to Back Bay standards, thank God, had been equally like himself.

That had been the last straw. He believed his father had given up all hope of him from that hour. Estranged weeks had followed. Then he had gone abroad.

Those five years in France and Italy with walking tours into Switzerland and the Austrian Alps! That year in Hungary, where he lived the life of a vagabond! Then the visit home, where he found all as he had left it. Even his father's sister—he could never think of her as his own relative—who had come to live with him, so fulfilled every Stanhope tradition she seemed always to have been there.

And he had stayed three months. Three months, during which only the patient courtesy accumulated during generations of Stanhopes, had made life endurable to them as well as to him. Then he had fled, as from a cloud that threatens to engulf.

This time it was Ireland, England, Scotland, Norway, Finland. And then—Russia!

Russia! It was there he had met—Her!

Stanhope started from his chair and walked about the room. He stopped, suddenly, brushed the hair from his forehead, and straightened himself. A man was weak who let his thoughts lead him backward. Or getting old.

He went back to his desk and glanced through the remainder of his mail. The letter from his publishers was the only one he need bother about this morning. He read it with a frown. Still asking for another book! As if a man could write to order! He expected to write another novel. But when? That question did not bother him. Fortunately, it was not necessary for him to write for money, and even if it were, the royalties from his book

had brought him a competence. A pity his father had never read his book. But the reviews had been enough. A Stanhope a realist! . . . Yet nothing is so ideal as the real. But his father would never be able to see it in this light.

Well, it was too bad. His father was a fine old gentleman. But a man could not live according to his father's code. Each man must live according to his own.

Stanhope laid his publisher's letter aside, to be answered at his leisure. He saw the opera tickets lying on his desk. The opera! He had forgotten about it. And forgotten about Josephine Prescott. He smiled. His book had shocked her, too. She had said it was wonderful. It was so real and thrilling. But he couldn't get her to talk about it farther. And she had blushed. She was particularly charming when she blushed.

But she was a sentimentalist. And he hated sentimentality. Yet hers amused rather than offended him. And she would grow out of it. Brandt would do much for her in that line. He had been doing a little himself in suggesting books for her to read. She had read a good deal for a small town girl, but mostly things that appealed to the sentiments. Very little that appealed to the mind. But to tell her this would be foolish. The forcing process would result in nothing but mental dizziness.

But why was he bothering about this girl's future? He, who had come to think of all women impersonally? And why had he asked her to go to the opera? Was he becoming a sentimentalist himself? If so, then Heaven help him.

Stanhope stretched himself and yawned. One o'clock! He would try to get hold of Jack and have lunch with him. Jack would knock the sentimentalism out of him.

But not a word would he say about taking a girl from an unheard-of little town in Ohio to hear *Tristan*. That would be giving Jack the whip hand.

Had Josephine known how Stanhope felt about going to the opera with her, she would not have been surprised. But had Stanhope known how Josephine felt about going with him, he would have been astonished.

"You know he doesn't care for opera," she explained to Alice Sothern, who was hurriedly altering a rose chiffon gown of her own, that her protégée might be correctly attired for the great occasion.

"Yes, I know," replied Alice, as she sat down on the floor to lengthen the skirt.

"I'd rather go the first time with someone who really loves it. He told me once that he had never subscribed. Think of a man with all his money, and loving music, too, not having his own seats at the Metropolitan. I told him I couldn't understand it. And what do you think he said?"

"It tips up in the back," said Alice, eying the skirt critically.

Josephine laughed. "No, he didn't say that."

"Please stand still. I never saw you so excited. You're fairly hysterical."

"He said that opera wasn't real music. That it was music and drama, and high-priced singers, and clothes and bad acting. Did you ever hear of such a thing? And he never sits in the best seats if he can help it. He goes way upstairs, where he can't see the fashionable people in the boxes."

"He won't be there tonight if he has Jack Randall's seats, and I imagine he has. He couldn't buy any at this late hour. So you will very likely sit in the Grand Tier."

"What's the Grand Tier?"

"The second row of boxes."

"Am I going to sit in a box?" Josephine asked, in awed amazement.

"Do you suppose I'd be so concerned over your gown

if I thought you were going to sit in the Family Circle? And if you appear in a box with an aristocrat, you must do both the box and the aristocrat justice."

"Is Mr. Stanhope an aristocrat?"

"To the finger tips."

"An aristocrat! But he doesn't look like one."

"Not to you, perhaps. But to those who have seen much of the type, he stands out conspicuously."

"But I've never been a bit afraid of him, and if I'd known he was an aristocrat I'd have been dreadfully afraid."

"It is just because he is such a thorough one that he hasn't made you feel it."

"Then I like aristocrats."

"So do I, when they don't care about it. Turn around and let me see if it hangs better. Yes, it's all right. You can take it off. All we need to do now is to hem it."

"But I can't wear it like this, without any sleeves, and the neck so low."

Alice got up from the floor and gave Josephine a light kiss on the cheek.

"You will wear it just as it is. You are exquisite in it."

Josephine ran to her room to look at herself in the glass. When she came back she was blushing, but radiant.

"It's lovely. You're a dear to fix it for me."

"And you are to wear my white opera cloak over it," said Alice. "Mr. Stanhope won't know you."

And Stanhope, when he saw Josephine, looked as surprised and delighted as Alice had expected. "Isn't she a beauty in that gown?" she asked, when Josephine had gone to get cloak and gloves.

Stanhope smiled. "A vision of loveliness."

"She has been so excited. This is a great event for her. It was good of you, Winthrop."

"It was purely selfish, I assure you. I look forward

to an unusual experience in seeing the effect of her first hearing of Tristan."

Josephine came back wrapped in the white cloak, and drawing on the gloves hastily purchased at a late hour.

"I'm ready," she said to Stanhope, shyly.

Alice was lying in bed, reading, when she returned. She heard her come into the living room and close the door, softly. "I'm not asleep," she called. "Come and tell me all about it."

She expected to see a girl more radiant than the one who had left her. But it was a pale exhausted Josephine who came slowly into the room.

"Child, you look ill!" exclaimed Alice.

"I'm just tired, that's all," said Josephine as she seated herself at the foot of the bed. "Oh, it was wonderful!" She threw off the cloak and leaned toward Alice, her eyes wide.

"Nordica was all in white, and she sang, oh, she sang so beautifully it hurt! When she waved her long white sleeves for Tristan to come, and the orchestra kept drawing everything up and up and up—to the great climax, I thought I couldn't stand it. Then, when Tristan came! The great Jean De Reszke! And when they sang the duet——" She stopped, and caught her breath. Then, with a little sob: "Oh! Miss Sothern! I didn't know music could be like that! I was glad when the king came and found them together. I couldn't have stood it another minute. And then, at the end, The Liebestod! I couldn't speak when the curtain went down. And I couldn't talk coming home. I wanted to tell Mr. Stanhope how much I enjoyed it, but I couldn't. I don't know what he thought of me."

"Winthrop would understand," said Alice.

"Do you think so? I wouldn't want him to think I

didn't appreciate his taking me. He was lovely to me all the evening." She grew suddenly animated. "Oh, Miss Sothern! I was so excited when I first got there. The opera house was so much bigger than I expected. All those boxes and galleries and then just thousands of people. And we did have Mr. Randall's seats in the Grand Tier. I was so glad you made me wear this dress. I'd have felt like a silly in anything I've got. And sitting there in a box with women and girls in the most wonderful clothes and diamonds all around us. They kept talking all the time. It made Mr. Stanhope furious. But after a while I didn't hear them. I didn't hear anything but the music. But I can see why Mr. Stanhope doesn't like to sit among all those fashionable people. They don't belong to the music. Hardly any of them came until after the first act, and lots of them left before *The Liebestod*. When I said I didn't understand why they came at all, Mr. Stanhope said they didn't understand themselves why they were there. And I expect he was right."

"You may depend on his generally being right when he talks about music," said Alice.

"Mr. Holbrooke and Mr. Carlton came into the box after the second act."

Alice made no reply.

"I was afraid they were going to stay for the rest of the opera, but they didn't. I wouldn't have cared if Mr. Carlton had stayed, but I always feel stupid when Mr. Holbrooke is near me. He's so critical and formal. He doesn't look the least bit like a painter. I don't like him at all. Do you?"

"Yes," said Alice, softly.

"Mr. Carlton made fun of the scenery. He said the scenery of all the Wagner operas was awful. No atmosphere. What did he mean by that?"

"My dear, at this time of night, and with you looking

like a ghost, we are not going to discuss Hamilton Carlton's views on stage mountings."

"Well, I thought the scenery was beautiful. Everything was beautiful. Oh, you should have heard the orchestra after Isolde had given Tristan the love potion, and they stood there, just looking at each other, and not singing a note. I'll never forget it! I'll never forget a single moment of the whole evening. The audience went just wild over the garden scene. And at the end of the opera they called the singers out over and over, and even the conductor had to appear with them. But they wouldn't stop until Nordica came out alone. Oh, Miss Sothern, you should have seen the flowers she got! Just dozens of great bouquets, and the loveliest wreaths, tied with long ribbons. But she didn't take the flowers herself. They were handed to two pages, who carried them behind the curtain. After Nordica had gone the audience kept on applauding and applauding. Then the curtain went up, and there she stood on the stage, with the flowers banked all around her. Oh, she was beautiful! And how the audience cheered her!"

Josephine stopped, her eyes ecstatic. After a moment she said, with a touch of envy:

"How wonderful it must be to have them applaud you like that!"

She crouched on the bed, leaning forward, her arms on her lap. Slowly the ecstasy died out. Her head drooped. A suggestion of bitterness came to her face.

Alice watched her, wondering.

Suddenly she looked up.

"I can thrill people, too!"

"Yes," said Alice.

"I have talent! I can become a big artist! I know I can!" She spoke with passionate resentment.

"Of course," said Alice, soothingly.

She saw the tense figure before her relax. The face darken. The eyes grow dull.

"But—this morning——" Josephine stopped. Her lips tightened. With a quick movement she slipped off the bed.

"I'm going now. Good night."

"Come," said Alice, stretching out her arms. "Why, you're burning with fever!" she exclaimed, as Josephine kissed her.

"I'm always that way when I'm excited." The reply came with forced brightness.

"Then run along. You need a good sleep."

Alone, in her room, Josephine threw herself on the bed and burst into passionate sobs.

CHAPTER IX

ON an afternoon some ten days later, Alice Sothern rang the bell of Brandt's house, and waited long for the answer that did not come. She rang again, with more insistence. After another long wait, the door opened a crack, and The Koubek, a brown shawl wrapped about her, looked out.

"I would like to see Mr. Brandt," said Alice, in her most gracious manner.

The Koubek shook her head. "It iss not to be possible."

"He is in?"

"It iss not to be possible. He sees nobody on any of the days after four of the clock."

"But will you please take my card to him? It explains why I am here."

"He sees nobody after four of the clock."

"But I beg of you to give him my card. I must see him about Miss Prescott. She is ill."

The Koubek pursed her lips. "So?"

"I have come to talk with Mr. Brandt about her."

"It iss not to be possible."

Alice, in despair, started down the steps. She had reached the last one when The Koubek called out, loudly:

"Dot younk lady. Vhat you say makes the matter mit her?"

Repressing her eagerness, Alice returned to the door.

"She is suffering from a nervous collapse, Mrs. Koubek."

"Vell, I dunno. I see. You vait and I speak mit my Master."

The Koubek closed the door, leaving Alice standing without in the cold. After what seemed to her an interminable time, the door was again opened.

"I tells him you brink knowledge of dot younk lady. He sees you shust vun minnit. Shust vun," said the Koubek, gruffly.

Alice entered the studio expecting to be met by a much disturbed Brandt. But she was received as affably as if it were he who had requested the interview.

"It makes me pleasure to see you, Miss——" He stopped and ran a hand through his hair, smiling ruefully. "Excuse, if you please. It comes that I have lost remembrance of your name."

"Miss Sothern," said Alice, smiling back at him.

"I thank you. Not again shall I lose the remembrance." He drew up a chair. "I beg you to be seated."

As Alice took the chair, he looked at her with open admiration. Faultlessly attired in tailor suit and furs, she made a pleasing picture.

Brandt seated himself.

"It gives me sorrow that Miss Prescott is ill. Does it come a dangerous illness?"

No, Alice explained, it was not a dangerous illness. It was a nervous collapse. Miss Prescott, on the evening of the day she had last been to him, had gone to the opera, apparently well. The next morning, however, she was in a high fever, and since then had been confined to her bed. It was plain that she was worrying over something, and as long as this continued she could not improve. She absolutely refused to talk of herself, and this visit had been made in the hope of discovering whether anything had happened in connection with her music to cause such a collapse. They had thought this very probable, since, whenever her music was mentioned, she turned away her head and would not speak.

"Pst!" exclaimed Brandt, springing to his feet. "What a silliness! She wants all the time only compliments. She has a talent, but she is—what is it you say in America?—she has the—um-m-m-m—the large head. Well, now you listen and I will tell you what makes her to go sick. In her last lesson she cry. She make the hysterics. She say she not learn fast enough. Well, I tell her it is not to come that she can be the artist in one or two years. I tell her it takes many years. I tell her she play like she was crazy, and it is not that she can be the artist until she has control of herself. And what comes to happen? Has it come that she works to control her talent? Pst! She makes for herself nothing but a pity. I get the word she is sick and I have a sorrow, for I think she have a trouble with the throat or something the same. And now you make me the knowledge she has the nervous fever because she finds not joy in her work. She speaks not of it, you say? Well, I have the desire that I would make speech with her. It is all a silliness and I send her home. Yes, I send her home!" he shouted, coming close to the astonished Alice. "Now you listen. When it is you are with her once more, you say, 'Brandt, he will have nothing again to do with you.' You tell her so. Will you keep the remembrance of it?"

Alice put out a beseeching hand. "I beg of you, Mr. Brandt, be lenient with her. She is so sensitive and nervous."

Brandt shrugged his shoulders and folded his arms.

"So? Well, I have also the sensitive thoughts. And I have also the nerves. Does it make me always pleasure to teach her? Does it?" He threw up his hands. "Pst! It makes me to go sick with the nerves. I have the chill when comes the end of the lesson. And I have the fever, ach! I have the fever something enormous!"

He threw back his head and laughed loudly. Seating

himself again, he ran his hands through his hair. The next moment he was all affability.

"Miss Prescott, she is the charming young girl. I have the liking for her. But she will not come to be the artist. She is too much the cry-baby. Well, you say to her when you see her once again, Brandt tells her, 'Good-by, and come the good luck.'"

"Mr. Brandt, please allow me to plead for her," said Alice, with such evident distress that Brandt leaned back in his chair, crossed his knees, and said, "Well?" in a tone of acquiescence.

Alice hesitated. He was ready to listen. But how unapproachable he seemed! She understood now why his pupils feared him.

As he waited for her to begin, Brandt smiled in a way that seemed a challenge to her. When she spoke, her face was more eloquent than her words.

"I didn't know until now, Mr. Brandt, that you told Miss Prescott it would take years for her to accomplish what she thought could be done in two at the most. Can't you appreciate the shock this must have been to her? Not only because of her own disappointment, but perhaps even more because of those who sent her here. She is being educated at other people's expense. They are her friends. Even her teachers at Jordan believed she needed only the finishing touches when she came to you. I, too, hold myself responsible in this respect. Think what it must have meant to her to hear the truth so suddenly."

The smile had left Brandt's face.

"If she have not the strength to make acquaintance with the truth," said he, quietly, "she have not the strength to become the artist. There comes not ever in the world the artist who hears only the pleasantness about his work. When he bids the truth welcome, then he shows reverence of his art. When he denies the truth, then he cares not

for his art. He cares but for what his art' does for him."

"Yes, you are right," said Alice, with a sigh. She knew there was no room for argument. All that was left for her was the direct question.

"Tell me, please, Mr. Brandt, if Miss Prescott proves she is willing to welcome the truth for the sake of her art, will you continue to teach her?"

Brandt smiled, this time cordially.

"I am ever willing to give earnest thought to the earnest pupil. But I care not only for the enthusiasm. If it comes she will return to me with the thought to study long and serious, then it will make me pleasure to teach her."

"You are very kind, Mr. Brandt, and I believe that Miss Prescott will prove worthy of your kindness."

As Alice rose, Brandt got hastily to his feet.

"Let me thank you, not only for Miss Prescott, but for myself," she said, holding out a white-gloved hand.

Brandt touched the fingers with his lips.

"Miss Prescott has the gracious advocate."

"And the gracious teacher," came the smiling reply.

Brandt, holding the door open for her, said, genially, "I bid you good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brandt."

As Alice was about to open the door to the street, The Koubek, still wrapped in the brown shawl, appeared from the shadow of the hall.

"I make it open for you," said she. Then, with a knowing look, "Dot younk ladty. Vhat you say makes the matter mit her?"

Alice was too distraught to resent the thrust. As she went quickly down the steps, the dismay she had succeeded in concealing from Brandt showed in her face.

She had bungled! In going to Brandt with the hope

of helping Josephine she had brought about her dismissal. If she hadn't gone to him he would never have suspected the cause of her illness. She had roused his anger against her instead of winning his sympathy. Unless the matter were smoothed over in some way, Josephine's lessons with him were at an end.

She hurried to the nearest public telephone, and, calling up Stanhope, was relieved to hear his voice. There was something she wanted to talk with him about, she explained. Couldn't they have tea together in some quiet place?

When, later, they sat at a table in Little Russia, Alice, with much perturbation, gave Stanhope an account of the interview.

"What a mistake I made in going to him!" she exclaimed, as she finished her story.

"I can't see it that way," said Stanhope, calmly.

"If I hadn't gone he would never have known her illness had anything to do with what he said to her."

"But it is quite clear now that what happened at her last lesson caused her collapse?"

"Oh, perfectly clear. As I have told you, I suspected that something had happened. That was my reason for going to him. I supposed she was simply exaggerating something he had said, and that he would give me some message to her that would cheer her up. And he is furious and has dismissed her. And all because of my stupidity. If I'd stayed out of it she would have returned to him when she was well again, and everything would have gone on as before. But in trying to help her I've ruined her future with him."

"You have established her future with him."

"What do you mean?"

Stanhope's tone became more serious as he said: "Let us agree that, if left to herself, she would eventually have

gone back to him. But how? Recovered in body, but not in mind. And the result? Uncertain work that would quickly end in a final dismissal. Brandt is right. She feels nothing now but pity for herself. But when she learns what he said to you——”

“But, Winthrop, I can’t tell her what he said!”

“You will have to.”

“Tell her that he dismissed her? Impossible!”

“Brandt agreed to take her back only on condition that she was told and proved strong enough to accept his verdict.”

“Yes. And I, of course, had to let him think that I intended to tell her everything. I could do nothing else. There was a finality in what he said that made argument impossible. Nor was there ground for argument. He is justified in the stand he has taken. But for all that, I can’t go to Josephine and tell her outright what he said.”

“It must be done if she is to go on.”

“But if you could see her, Winthrop! It would be cruel!”

“Yes, it would be cruel. But it must be done.”

“And I hoped you would suggest some way of smoothing it over!” said Alice, despairingly.

“I wouldn’t do her that injustice even if it were in my power, which it isn’t. Brandt has made it impossible for her to go on unless she is told.”

“If I had only let events take their natural course!”

“If events had taken their natural course, she would have wept her way out of Brandt’s favor. Now she’s going to fight her way into it.”

“I don’t understand.”

“When she learns what he said to you, she will stop pitying herself. She will feel resentment toward you and toward him. That will put her on her mettle. Then she

will go back to Brandt and do better work than ever. You did her a genuine service today."

"I wish I could look at it as you do. But I can't. And even if she does go on and do better work, think what she has before her, Winthrop, if she is to succeed even in a small way. As I talked with Brandt I regretted I had helped her to come to New York. But she seemed bigger to me when I heard her at Jordan than she seems here. And then, I'm not a musician. If she'd been an art student I could have sized her up accurately. Still, I feel I should have known."

"Perhaps you did size her up accurately. The fact that Brandt is willing to let her go on seems to bear you out."

"But he expects her to go on for years. How is she going to do it? She hasn't enough to take her through two years. That may be what is worrying her. That, and the thought of all those Parksburg people who sent her here, and are expecting her to be a finished artist at the end of next season. I don't wonder she's flat on her back."

"Nor I," said Stanhope, gravely. His face softened. "I'm sorry for her. But the thought of Parksburg isn't what has made her ill. She has come to the gateway."

Alice looked at him, questioningly. He went on:

"She has come to the gateway beyond which all must pass who would attain fame through art. For years she has buoyantly been ascending the road that leads to it, confident that her talent would be an 'Open Sesame.' And now she has suddenly been told there is no magic pass-key to the realm of the great. That her talent is but the implement with which to cast the key, and that its mold can be fashioned only through years of thought and labor. But she will not believe. She is thinking of herself as abused, misunderstood, unappreciated."

"Winthrop! It's a tragedy!" exclaimed Alice, passionately.

"Yes, but a very common tragedy. All students studying under big masters who are honest with them go through such an experience. And they all collapse. Many of them never gather themselves together sufficiently to go on. I think she could have done it, but, as I have said, she would have worked in the wrong spirit, and no good would have come of it. You have it in your power to put her on her feet; to give her a new chance. Tell her all that Brandt said. The shock will cure her."

"You may be right," admitted Alice, reluctantly, "but, after all, I feel it isn't so much a question of the spirit in which she works, but how she will ever be able to keep going as long as Brandt expects."

"Yes, her financial future is a serious difficulty. But neither you nor I can solve it. I'm glad she has enough to bring her back next year. She will pull through the year, financially, some way. Her second winter will give her a chance to find herself. And she deserves the chance. In my opinion, if she has but two winters in New York they will balance whatever disappointments or anxieties she may have to meet at the end of them. She will have learned enough by that time to place her beyond what she could ever have become if she'd been deprived of her lessons with Brandt. In whatever way she uses her music afterward, her scope will be enlarged. Perhaps she will become a concert artist. If so, she will have to meet her difficulties as they present themselves. To anticipate them would mean to handicap herself with worry. I doubt if she does this. She is not of that temperament, fortunately. In the meantime she is pretty sure of her two years. I consider her problem less difficult than that of the average student who comes to New York. For one thing, she is ideally situated. The majority of students are forced to

live in uncongenial surroundings and half starve themselves in order to keep on. They have to meet their discouragements alone. She has you."

"And you," said Alice, pointedly.

"Yes, and me," was Stanhope's firm reply.

"Yet both of us together can do little, Winthrop. Such battles as hers have to be fought alone. No, I can't look at it as you do. I wish she had stayed in Parksburg. Then she would have married Sam Sterling. I met him. A fine handsome young man, crude, of course, but with something splendid about him for all that. It was clear enough that he worships her."

"That girl settle down in Parksburg!"

Alice suppressed a smile.

Stanhope did not look up. "She should have her chance," he said.

"But a home—and love—and children!"

"It needn't be in Parksburg."

"She might do worse than settle down in Parksburg."

"She is going to stay here and study with Brandt," said Stanhope, doggedly.

"That means that I must tell her what he said. I dread it."

"Tell her the truth. It will work a cure."

"I'll do it." Alice spoke wearily.

Stanhope's eyes flashed.

"You will find she has the strength to face the truth."

"I doubt it."

Stanhope smiled. "I think I understand her better than you do."

CHAPTER X

It was as Stanhope had foreseen. The whole truth worked a cure in Josephine. At first she had flared into a rage against both Alice and Brandt. How had Alice dared to take things into her own hands in that way! So Brandt had said she was a cry-baby! That she did nothing but pity herself. That she didn't care for music, but only cared for what it could do for her. Well, she would show them all how much she cared. And she was going to be a famous artist, if she had to walk over everything and everybody to do it.

Within a few days she was again at the piano, working, not with more diligence, for that was impossible, but with more concentration. She went back to her lessons quite as if her illness had been wholly physical, and with a certain sweet dignity that made Brandt acknowledge to himself that "she had the strength to make acquaintance with the truth." Between them nothing was said of Alice's interview. Brandt was as severe as before, but she did not falter under his most denunciatory criticisms. He could not but admire the firmness with which she tried to meet his demands.

But she was not the same girl who had come to New York some five months before. She had lost her unbridled enthusiasm. But she was never more determined to succeed. How long it would take and how she was to manage were questions she refused to face. She would work for two years, and then—then she would find some way to go on.

Lurking in the back of her mind—unrecognized—was hope. For Josephine was essentially an optimist. The

optimism was now only a vague instinct. But it sustained her.

She went regularly to the concerts, and where, hitherto, she had taken small interest in the classical programs, she now gave them her serious attention. She would rather have gone oftener to the opera. But Brandt had told her the opera could wait. Concerts must come first.

She saw little of anyone but Alice Sothern. When she occasionally mingled in the gay crowd that had hitherto diverted her, she was preoccupied. Eugénie Fragonard openly accused her of being in love. Hamilton Carlton, who had been wont to seek her out because she was so responsive to his youthful enthusiasms, now found her such a dull listener that he ceased to confide to her his dreams of becoming a playwright. But Georgette Randolph, who, up to now, had shown no inclination to carry out her suggestion that Josephine come to see her and meet Grace Mandeville, the violinist who lived with her, began to manifest an active interest.

"You don't need to tell me what's the matter with her," she said to Alice Sothern. "I haven't lived with a disappointed violinist for nothing. I know all the signs of blighted hopes. Your protégée's had her first setback, and she's taking it hard. She's evidently got just what was coming to her, but, all the same, I'm sorry for her. It must be mighty tough on you. I'll do my best to help cheer her up. Think I'll see that she meets Grace. Misery likes company, you know."

But Josephine proved as indifferent to Georgette's advances as to Eugénie Fragonard's teasing allusions to the ravages of concealed love. Alice, worried, appealed to Stanhope to use his influence to draw her away from herself.

"Let her alone," Stanhope had advised. "She's going through a phase of reconstruction. When she comes out

of it she will work with all the more intelligence. And in time she will regain her light-heartedness. But it won't be as spontaneous as it was."

And again he was right. Gradually, something of her light-heartedness returned to Josephine. It deceived Alice, but not Stanhope. He knew that the source was no longer clear. It had been stirred too deeply.

Josephine's letters home at this time, while never more affectionate, plainly showed her preoccupation.

"You're growing so serious," wrote Aunt Mary. "You don't say anything about New York and all those people you've met. You used to write so much about them. And I like to know everything you're doing." Then she went on to tell the latest Parksburg news. Much of it was about Sam. He was giving a good deal of attention to the oil business these days, and expected to drill a number of wells in the spring. "Some of us think he's going to be the leading business man in this section. Although he's so steady, he's got a venturesome streak, too, and that's a good thing. He's not going to be satisfied with running a small dry-goods store all his life. The other day he bought part of the Norris farm. Gave a mortgage on it, and it does seem risky. But he's sure there's oil there, although everyone else says it's off the vein. But when Sam gets an idea in his head, he sticks to it. He's just as good and kind to me as if he was my son. Susie Hatfield's running after him more than ever since you left. There's no telling what may happen. Lots of matches are made that way. But in my opinion there's just one girl good enough for Sam."

"No, no!" said Josephine, aloud.

She hoped Susie Hatfield would get him. Susie liked Parksburg as much as Sam did. Neither of them had understood for a minute why she wanted to get away. They'd be bored to death to lead the life she was leading. Just lessons and concerts—lessons and concerts.

Why, it was two o'clock, and the Novak concert was at three! Novak, the great Polish violinist! She must begin to get ready. She would wear the new lace waist Aunt Mary had just sent her. She wanted to look her best. Everybody in town would be there. Mr. Stanhope had said so. For this was Novak's first concert in America. Mr. Stanhope had said it would make history. He had heard him in Europe, and simply raved over him. How funny Brandt was when she asked if he knew him. "Know him! Since he was so high as my knee! There is one great artist!" And tomorrow night Brandt was going to give a dinner for him. Mrs. Koubek had told her about it. Paderewski was to be there, and Ysaye, and Lilli Lehmann, and Sembrich, and the De Reszkes, and that Josef Hofmann who was such a wonderful pianist, although he was only as old as she was. Think of his being great enough now to be invited among all those famous people who were so much older! She was going to hear him next week. She could hardly wait. But she must hurry and get dressed. She wouldn't miss a note of the Novak recital for the world. It was wonderful to be in New York, where she could hear such a great man!

Stanhope, standing with Carlton in front of the hall after the recital, saw Josephine coming down the steps with Georgette Randolph and Grace Mandeville. The two men greeted the girls as they reached the sidewalk, and drew them apart from the crowd.

"Grace and I have gone mad over Novak," said Georgette.

"I never heard him play so superbly." Stanhope spoke with fervor.

"A master!" exclaimed Carlton, dramatically.

"I feel as if I could never touch my violin again," said Grace, a slender dark girl with moody eyes.

Stanhope turned to her. "Such playing inspires a greater reverence in all of us toward our work."

At this moment appeared Eugénie Fragonard.

"Stanhope, you were right! This recital has made history in New York. Don't ask me to discuss his playing. It was indescribably great. How I pity the critics! No new adjectives to draw on. Did you ever see such an entrance? That reserved carriage! And such a head! Who ever saw its like off a Greek statue! What other man could hold it thrown back like that, without seeming proud? And that forehead! Noble! Such hair! As blond as a Viking's! It's a head——"

"Fraggie," interrupted Georgette, "in raving over Novak's head, you're losing your own."

"I would lay it on the block for him!"

They had all forgotten Josephine, who was standing in the background, her face flushed, her eyes troubled. But now Stanhope remembered.

"Well?" he asked, smiling at her.

She looked at him, then at the others.

"Yes, I liked him. His tone is wonderful, and I never heard such technic. But he left me feeling cold. He didn't let himself go. Not once. He didn't give me any thrills."

There was an instant's silence.

"Gad!" said Carlton.

"Good Lord!" blurted out Georgette. "And you call yourself——"

Eugénie broke in with a laugh.

"Tell that to Brandt, child. But take a life preserver with you, or you will be drowned in a sea of invective."

Josephine shrank back, her lips trembling. Grace put a kindly hand on her arm.

"I've heard so much about you through Georgette. You must come and see us. Perhaps we can play together."

"Can you come to tea next Sunday afternoon?" asked Georgette.

"Yes," said Josephine, faintly.

As the group separated, she found herself walking with Stanhope.

"It is early," said he. "What do you say to a walk in the park? The air is like spring."

"But I ought to hurry home and work at my harmony before dinner."

"Work at a harmony lesson after hearing Novak? My dear child!"

Josephine turned to him, resentful. "Oh, I know you think I made a fool of myself when I said that Novak didn't thrill me. But he didn't! I was never so disappointed in my life! He's perfectly wonderful, I know, because he never makes a slip and never gets excited and has that big rich tone. But he didn't give me any thrills. Not one!"

"Don't blame Novak for that," said Stanhope, shortly.

"But it surely isn't my fault."

"No, it isn't your fault. It's your limitation."

She stopped short. "So you do think I made a fool of myself. But you needn't have told me so."

"Forgive me. I was rude. I am sorry."

Stanhope guided her across Fifty-ninth Street and into the park. He wished he had not proposed the walk.

"But why am I so wrong about him?" she asked, impatiently. "I love music more than I love anything else in the world. I'm sure there were hundreds of people in the audience today who don't care for it as I do, yet they all seemed to adore Novak, while I felt that something was lacking. Why shouldn't he satisfy me, if I'm really musical? And I know I'm that. Even Brandt says I am."

"My dear Josephine,"—it was the first time Stanhope had used the name, yet it came so naturally that neither of them noticed it,—“we all know that you are ‘really musical,’ as you put it. But it takes more than a natural talent to appreciate a great artist. It is true that such

supreme mastery of itself carries conviction, but it takes years of cultivation through hearing music to understand Novak's greatness. He has spent a lifetime in developing his art, although he was more than just 'really musical' in the beginning. How then can you, who have only begun to study, pass judgment on him?"

"Oh, stop! Stop! I won't listen. That's the way Brandt talked to me before I was ill, and I haven't loved music since. I've worked harder than ever before, but I haven't loved the work. I've hated it, at times. Simply hated it. And I don't believe you're right. I can't believe it. I won't! Music is a beautiful, free, glorious thing. I've always felt that way about it. But here in New York I'm made to feel that it's only something to be learned and learned and learned. It's taken all the joy out of my work. I haven't had any pleasure in practicing, not one minute, since I was ill, although I haven't said anything about it to anyone, not even Miss Sothern. But do you want to know why I was ill? I'll tell you."

Josephine went on, wildly, telling Stanhope that which he already knew, but which she thought he was hearing for the first time. She mimicked Brandt as she quoted the things he had said to her during that memorable interview. "Oh, he was cruel!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"Brandt has been very good to you," interposed Stanhope.

"Yes, he is good to me. I don't mean to seem ungrateful. But it's so hard, so terribly hard always to be told that I'm in the wrong about music. I haven't been caring quite so much lately, and now, today, about Novak, I seem to be more than ever in the wrong. Yet I can't feel that I'm wrong. I can't!"

"Would you put your opinion up against that of all musical Europe, and such authorities in America as Brandt?"

"But I'm surely not doing that! I—I——" She hesitated, embarrassed.

"It's just what you're doing. You insist you can't feel that you're wrong. If you will just put it that you can't see why you're wrong, you will be consistent. Don't make the mistake so often made by narrow minds, the mistake of condemning art because you don't understand it. You have failed to appreciate Novak. My dear child, look to yourself for the reason, not to him."

The kindly tone in which Stanhope spoke made all that he said seem the more final to Josephine. She had no right to an opinion! And all the others felt the same way toward her! She knew nothing of music!

Her step lagged. Then she stopped. Tears blinded her.

"Oh, I wish I had never come to New York!"

Stanhope looked at her. Something vital seemed to have passed from her. She was very beautiful and very pathetic. The color in his face deepened. His eyes lighted with sudden fire.

She brushed the tears from her eyes.

"I should have stayed in Parksburg. That's where I belong."

Stanhope, his eyes fixed on her face, did not speak.

"I'm nobody here."

He turned away from her. When he turned back, his face was pale.

"Let us walk on," he said.

They walked slowly, and for a time in silence. Then Josephine spoke:

"I've made a mistake. I should never have come."

Stanhope's voice was unsteady as he answered:

"No, you haven't made a mistake."

She turned to him, quickly.

"You think I shouldn't be discouraged? That I ought to keep on?"

"Of course you must keep on."

"You really mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it," said he, but he did not look at her.

She drew a long breath. "Then I'll keep on! I'll never give up! Oh, Mr. Stanhope! I can't tell you what your encouragement means to me! And now"—her voice wavered—"please let me go home by myself. I—I want to be alone."

He stopped, abruptly.

"It shall be as you wish," said he, extending his hand.

She grasped it in both of hers.

"You are my kind friend."

With a last glance of gratitude she was gone. Stanhope watched her until she disappeared around a bend in the road.

"God!" he exclaimed. "I love her!"

He started after her with long strides. Why had he let her go? He would tell her! Yes, he would tell her that he wanted her. He wanted her—now!

He hurried, exultant, until, as he turned the bend in the road, he caught sight of her in the distance.

He stopped, his exultation gone.

"You are my kind friend," she had said.

He turned and slowly retraced his steps.

Love him? She had never loved him for a moment, and never would. Did she care for any man? There was that fellow back home. What about him? But it didn't matter. She was in love with nothing but her ambition.

"Damn ambition—in women!" said Stanhope, under his breath.

And in Josephine, of all others! Josephine, who was even yet more the girl than the woman. How quickly ambition would destroy her beauty, her simplicity, her charm! For this girl's rightful destiny was love. And her rightful destiny would claim her. She would not long resist her

womanhood. Never was a woman more molded for love.

And he loved her! He wanted her!

For an instant Stanhope's exultation returned. Then he felt the frank-hearted clasp of her hands. He heard the passionless voice.

"You are my kind friend."

CHAPTER XI

JOSEPHINE sat at the breakfast table, next morning, with a pile of newspapers beside her. She had hurried to the nearest newsstand to buy them, as she was eager to see what the critics had to say about Novak. Alice, who was leaving the apartment as she came back, had said, laughingly: "You'll find as many opinions as there are papers."

Well, she would see.

She searched anxiously for the criticism through the paper that came first to hand—it chanced to be the *Tribune*. She found it at last, and a full column. As she read she frowned and tapped the floor with a nervous foot.

The article finished, she threw the paper aside, and reached for the *Sun*. Here the writer's enthusiasm was fully forecast in the heading. She read with growing depression.

Then the *Sun* was thrown aside and, one by one, the other papers followed.

For once all the critics said the same thing. Novak was a supreme artist.

She questioned herself in dismay. What was the matter with her? She was wrong about him. There could be no doubt of it now. The critics all spoke of Novak's temperament. And she had felt that he didn't show a bit of real emotion. They said he was the greatest Bach player ever heard in New York. And she hadn't liked his Bach at all. After he had finished the *Chaconne* she had said to herself that she would rather hear that young man play it who had given a recital at Jordan once—she couldn't remember his name—but he had created a sensation at the college. He had played—well—Deacon Hatfield would

have said he "played like a house afire." That was just Deacon Hatfield's way of saying he liked the music. And wasn't it a wonderful thing to make such people enjoy music? People who didn't know a thing about it? She didn't believe Novak could do that. He was too cold and quiet.

Yet everybody else thought he wasn't cold. The heading in one of the papers had said, "Novak thrills immense audience at Carnegie Hall." Yes, she was wrong. And she couldn't understand why. Mr. Stanhope had said this wasn't her fault but her limitation. This was the same as telling her she wasn't enough of a musician to know a great artist when she heard one. It was a horrid thing for him to say. But he had been kind—afterward. Was he right? Yes, he must be right. How often Brandt had told her she must understand music with the mind as well as the heart. Perhaps that was what Mr. Stanhope meant. Why was Brandt forever talking about understanding music? She had always thought you must just *feel* it. She'd always made people *feel* music when she played. And Novak hadn't made her really feel the music at all. She hadn't had one single thrill. Why?

She was still trying to find an answer to this question when she arrived at Brandt's for her lesson. The moment she entered the studio she knew he was in good humor. He was seated at his desk, which was covered with newspapers.

"Ach!" he exclaimed, "that was one great concert Novak played yesterday. It was so great that not one critic said of it anything but praise. It would have come a joke on the critic who said else. I could not sleep all the night. The music was always with me. That Novak! Ach, that Novak is—but it comes not possible to name how great he is. You heard that concert like I told you? —Well, that is good. You know now what I mean when

I say to you the artist knows always what he is about. Novak has the emotion something wonderful. So deep and warm and living. It reaches straight to the heart. And why? For the reason that he controls it always with his mind. It is never destroyed by the hysterics. He has the great intelligence. He knows much of things other than music. He knows all of music. He has the warm imagination like the poet. And he has the cool brain like the philosopher. But he was not always as today. When a child he was so the marvel they go wild over him in Poland. When comes the time he is twelve he play all over Europe. They make of him a little god. Then he comes to twenty years. He is no longer judged as the child. He is judged as the man. The critics and the public of intelligence say he is spoiled. He but plays to make the big effect. Does he laugh at them and say his so great talent is sufficient? No! He makes for himself a retreat. For some years he is heard no more. Then he again appear. Ach! What a so great artist is he become! And since then he become greater each year. He is now the artist to reverence. Yesterday—ach! music like that! That is what music is. If it should come that all the players give to their listeners such interpretation, then all who hear them would come to love the great music. Ach! That Novak!”

Brandt leaned forward in his chair, his clasped hands hanging between his knees. He smiled, and muttered to himself, and nodded his head. Then his face grew heavy and sad.

Josephine watched him, not daring to speak. At last he said, in a resigned voice:

“Ach, well! And it is for me only to teach. Only to teach.”

He got up, slowly.

“Come. We now make the lesson.”

As the lesson proceeded, Josephine knew she was playing with more composure and clarity than usual. Brandt seemed pleased and said, "Well, I think it come you begin to know something."

But when she came to the Beethoven it was again the old story of interruptions and scathing criticisms. She knew nothing of phrasing! Play not the staccato so frivolous! Did she think *diminuendo* mean *ritardando*? Did she think *crescendo* mean the sudden loudness? If she desire always to make the dramatic effect then come no more here. Go to the school of elocution. Ach! That climax! It was destroyed so soon as begun. Had he not told her one thousand times how to build the climax?

With the last interruption Brandt lifted a supplicating hand to the painting of Beethoven over the piano.

"Forgive her. She is but a child in art."

He turned to Josephine.

"We no longer study the sonata," he said, mildly. "I excuse you from Beethoven. Sometime it may come you play him. I do not know."

She clasped her hands tightly in her lap to stop their trembling. She did not speak.

Brandt beat a swift rhythmic tattoo on the piano. His eyes narrowed, irritably.

"You play Beethoven like he was Tschaikowsky."

Josephine looked at him, blankly. He broke into remonstrance.

"You are too stupid! I say to you that you play Beethoven like he was Tschaikowsky. That should be sufficient to give you the understanding how you play Beethoven. But does it? Pst! It means nothing to you."

"But, Mr. Brandt——"

"Silence! I have not the desire to hear you speak of that you do not comprehend. And that makes the trouble," in quieter tone, "that makes the trouble. Never can it

come that you play well until you have the comprehension of these things in music. I expect not the full comprehension in one so young. But you should come to know something by now of Beethoven. But do you? No!"

He turned from her with a shrug of the shoulders. She did not move as he walked the length of the room and back. He stopped again by her side.

"It is a profanity to play Beethoven like he was Tschai-kowsky. Do you have the desire to know why it is a profanity? Well, now you listen and I will tell you. Tschai-kowsky—ach! how can I say it so you have the understanding? Well, I explain. Tschai-kowsky, he had the gift of melody something wonderful. He had fire and passion. He had also the understanding of all the different instruments in the orchestra. But how did he speak in his music? You do not know? Then I tell you. Tschai-kowsky—what shall I say? This English language! Ach! Now it comes to me. Tschai-kowsky, he look much within himself. He think always of his own feelings. When he write music he write of himself. He write not of life. Sometimes he was happy. Then he speak happiness in his music. But he was more unhappy. He had the morbidness. So he say in his music: 'Life is a wretchedness. I live in darkness, so all is dark. Man dies but to pass into greater darkness.' To all the world Tschai-kowsky made known his own experience. His heart he displayed on his sleeve. And he said, 'My life—that is what it is to live.' But Beethoven! Ach! the difference! He, likewise, was much unhappy. But he weep not aloud on the shoulder of the world. Beethoven, he stand above himself. He look at all in life. That is how it comes when a man is great. He knows that life is more as what it comes he is himself. When Beethoven made speech in music he told of more as himself. He made utterance for the world. That is how it comes he is so great a master. That is why so long as

music is in the world the reverence will be his. But always it will be that some have not the comprehension. You have it not. You make the great master like he was Tschaikowsky, who beat always upon his breast, crying, 'I! I! I!' It comes that you do this for you want always to talk of yourself when you play! You feel all excited and you tear Beethoven to pieces to tell how you feel. You do so to Beethoven, and he not once would so tear music to pieces to speak of himself. I expect not more of you as your youth makes possible. Comprehension of Beethoven comes not in full measure even to great genius when they are young. But they have sufficient understanding to play him with reverence. You show not that reverence."

As Josephine started to speak, Brandt stopped her.

"Say nothing! You have not knowledge of these matters. Now you listen. I tell you it is with the performer as with the composer. How does it come the great performer makes the interpretation of the masters? Does he seek in them only what he feels within? Ach, no! The great interpreter, he seeks to find what the masters have to tell him. If he is a most great interpreter, he comes, after long study, to understand what the master has to say. And as he learns he grows within himself. He comes to understand the music even as the master understand when he compose it. And then it is even so as if the composer and interpreter are one. It is the same with the interpreters of other masters than the masters in music. And the great interpreters of whatever art is theirs, you find them not alike in their interpretations. Each gives something of his personality to his interpretation. But they all have realization of the truth that personality should be but as the spark that kindles a work to life. They have realization that if it become the flame, then, with their personality, they consume that they would interpret. In music, many with the so great talent so consume the works of the masters. For

this reason they become never the great interpreters. They make the big effect and draw the ignorant crowds. Then what comes to happen? In one short time they are as nothing. They find destruction in their egotism. That is how it comes you are all the time pale and nervous. You seek to play the masters only to speak of yourself. But I talk to you no more. You have not the understanding."

Josephine's attitude of depression had gradually changed to one of alert interest. "Why, Mr. Brandt! I never knew there were such differences in music!" There was a new fiber in her voice. "I never had anyone to tell me such things."

"Well, Reicher should have told you. But he—well—he comes the worn man when you know him, and he was never the so understanding interpreter. He had always the technic in mind."

The door opened and The Koubek entered, carrying a plate on which was a large cup. Brandt threw up his hands and backed away until he stood between the end of the piano and the wall. "Go away! Go away! I take it not! How have you the dare to come to me now? I make a lesson with the young lady."

The Koubek, unheeding, walked calmly up to him. "It iss now time for the soup. 'Gif it to him cums tree hours past,' iss vhat the doctor say."

"Pst! I take it not! Am I a baby to be nursed comes every three hours? Pst! Go away! It is an enormous impudence that you come to me while I make a lesson. You think I take it? Ha-ha! Ha-ha! That comes a joke on you. I take it not!"

As he protested, Brandt looked furtively about for a means of escape. He had backed himself into a corner. Before him was the massive form of The Koubek.

"Why you stand there like a stupid? Go away! Ach! How it smells!" Brandt grasped his nose and made a wry

face. "Bah!" He approached close to The Koubek, who had not taken her eyes from him nor changed her expression. He shook his finger in her face. "Now you listen. You go away. I give you one second. Just one. If you go not, I throw the soup in your face. Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha—ha—h-a-a."

Brandt's guffaw wavered and broke. Again he raised his hand with the admonishing forefinger extended. Then, slowly, the hand dropped until it reached the plate. He seized the cup, drained it at a draught, and then, as his arm went out in a vindictive flourish, The Koubek caught it and took the cup from his grasp. She turned and walked majestically to the door. As she opened it she looked at the clock. "Ven it cums tree hours past, I cum back."

The instant the door was closed Brandt sprang across the room and opened it. The Koubek's step could be heard as she descended the stairs. Brandt shook his fist in the direction of the sound. "I have you no longer in my house. I send you away!"

He closed the door with a bang. "That woman! She makes me to go crazy. I have her no more here." Then, seeing that Josephine was stifling her laughter with her handkerchief, he shouted, "Now what makes the matter with you?"

She was quick to deceive him.

"Mrs. Koubek is so funny," she gasped.

Brandt's laugh rang through the studio. "I made her to seem ridiculous. So? She comes not here again with the soup when I make a lesson. That woman—that woman—she—" his voice softened—"that woman—she is very good to me. Very good. I have in here," pressing a hand over his heart, "much feeling for her. I tell her I send her away but that is only to make a scare for her. She is my friend. She all the time works too

much for me. But never once more do I take that soup comes every three hours."

The following Sunday Josephine delighted the group gathered in the living room at Georgette's, with a description of this scene. She was a good mimic, and had many a time set Aunt Mary laughing like a girl, with her impersonation of old Adolph Reicher at a lesson. But this was the first time she had revealed the accomplishment to her New York friends.

Stanhope and Carlton, standing together at the end of the room, laughed heartily.

"If she should ever give up the piano she might turn to the stage," said Stanhope. "Perhaps you may be writing a comedy for her some day."

"Gad!" exclaimed Carlton. "Who would have believed she could do it? I've always thought she was devoid of humor."

"Because you take yourself so seriously when you talk with her," came Stanhope's quick reply.

"Or perhaps I haven't taken her seriously enough to see much of her."

"Another mistake of youth," drawled Stanhope.

"Would you advise me to follow your example?"

"Always."

"But I speak specifically."

"I said always."

"You are either a generous man or a sure one."

"I am not in a position to be either."

"Ah! A guide, then. Sort of an understudy for Brandt, as it were."

"You flatter me."

Carlton gave Stanhope a knowing look.

"Psychology has taught me that a man of forty is in love with youth."

"Then forty is an enviable age."

Carlton laughed. "I withdraw."

"Don't. I'm enjoying it."

Georgette, who had overheard as she was passing, stopped.

"So you're enjoying yourself, Winthrop. I breathe easier. I was overcome when you appeared. First time you've ever honored this humble home by your presence. Judge it not by its outward appearance, I beseech you. It's as rich in its occupants as 'tis poor in its furnishings. Has the proverbial out-at-elbows genius look, don't you think?"

Stanhope glanced around the room that, for all its shabby furniture and untidiness, had an air of comfort.

"You will never take the prize for good housekeeping," said he, "but it has the flexible, home-like atmosphere that good housekeeping often destroys."

Georgette laughed. "Many are my sins, but good housekeeping isn't one of them."

"These old apartment buildings are where you find the big rooms," said Eugénie Fragonard, who was luxuriously occupying the large wicker reading chair. "My living room isn't more than half this size," she added in a complaining voice.

"You'd live in a closet for the sake of having ivory woodwork and mahogany doors," replied Georgette.

"And an elevator. Don't forget the elevator, dear one," cooed Eugénie. She sank back in her chair. "Oh, those stairs of yours! Three long flights! I've been here for half an hour and haven't recovered sufficiently to unbutton a glove."

"Stanhope isn't used to stairs, either," said Georgette. She gave him a meaning smile. "Of course, what induced you to climb them was the hope of hearing some music. But the only artist here is Hastings, the pianist, and he has flatly refused to play. Says the piano is too rotten. The only time I ever heard him speak the truth."

"It is worth having a rotten piano to call forth the truth from him."

"Did you hear that, Hastings?" called Georgette, and she repeated Stanhope's comment.

Hastings, standing by Georgette's desk, looking at some drawings, threw back his head with a guffaw.

"It's worth telling the truth once to get a rise out of Stanhope. Didn't know before he recognized my existence." He turned to Josephine, who was sitting on the couch. "Come on, little one, tell us another story. Damned clever the way you took off old Brandt. Serves him right."

Josephine flushed angrily.

"I wasn't making fun of him."

"Oh, weren't you? I'm disappointed."

"How horrid of you! I wouldn't make fun of Brandt for the world. He's wonderful."

Hastings sat down beside her. "Wish those pretty lips were as ready to praise me." Then, seeing Josephine was about to leave, he said: "The old man's a master, I'll admit. Greatest piano teacher living. But a brute of a taskmaster. I've sweat blood under his rod for nine years."

Josephine looked at him, earnestly.

"Did you expect to study that long when you first went to him?"

"Lord, no! Went to him for the finishing touches, as I supposed. Expected to be with him a winter or two. Got the finishing touches, all right. Delivered with a heavy hand. But it took nine years. I grew to hate Brandt like death. Yet I would have crawled to my lessons on my belly, if I couldn't have got there any other way. He taught me everything I know about music. I've had lessons when I didn't play a note. Just sat there and listened while he told me what an ass I was, and how to get over it. He made a musician of me, damn him! Beg pardon.

I've sworn at him so much behind his back it's become a habit. But if I succeed, it will be his doing."

"He told you once that you were one of the joys of all his life. I was in the hall and heard him."

"Yes, he's satisfied with me now."

"Have you ever heard him play?" Then, without waiting for an answer, Josephine added: "Every time I take a lesson I hope he'll play. But all he's ever done is to show how a passage ought to be phrased, or to suggest a different fingering."

"Never heard him play but once, when he did second piano for me in the Chopin Concerto. At other times he's called in a pupil for second."

"But I've heard he was a concert pianist years ago."

"Yes, and a successful one, so they say. Why he gave it up no one knows. I asked him once, and got a look as black as a thunder cloud. Some mystery about it. Thought I was going to solve it one day. He was rummaging through a drawer in his desk and a picture fell out. I picked it up. Knew it was Brandt, although it must have been taken forty years ago. Couldn't mistake that head. He was in evening clothes, white kids, and carried a stove-pipe hat and a cane. He was standing near a grand piano. I said, 'Say, how's it happen you're rigged up like this when there's a piano in sight?' You ought to have seen him pounce on that picture. Grabbed it from me as if I'd been trying to steal it. Then he looked at it, and I thought he was going to cry. Give you my word I did. While he was soft like that, I got him to tell me when the picture was taken. He said that was his concert dress when he was a young man. Said it was the custom then for a pianist to go on the stage carrying his hat and stick and wearing gloves. After he'd laid the hat and stick on a chair, he sat down at the piano and drew off the gloves.

Great Scott! Wouldn't that put a fellow in a mood to play a Chopin program!"

Hastings, who had raised his voice when he noticed that others beside Josephine were listening, ended with a roaring laugh.

Stanhope, who had drawn near, said:

"I remember seeing Von Bülow come on the stage for a recital wearing white gloves which he pulled off leisurely while he sat at the piano surveying the audience."

"Are you sure he took them off?" asked Hastings. "From accounts I've read of his playing, it must have sounded as if he'd kept them on."

"There are some pianists with big reputations, today, who would benefit from being not only gloved but hand-cuffed," retorted Stanhope.

Hastings joined in the general laugh. "Can't compete with you when it comes to words. They're your specialty."

"Hastings recognize a superior! Astonishing!" exclaimed Eugénie.

"Oh, I'm a modest fellow."

"Couldn't be. A modest musician? There ain't no sich animal," said Georgette.

"Oh, come now," protested a foreign-looking youth of unkempt appearance.

"Tut! I know what I'm talking about," replied Georgette, as she busied herself making the tea. "Wasn't I a newspaper writer once upon a time? And haven't I interviewed scores of musicians? Believe me, I never knew one who didn't love me to death as soon as he found I wanted to write an article about him."

Hastings rose and approached her.

"I present myself as an exception to the rule," said he, grandiloquently. "I'll love you to death e'en though you never get my name into print."

Georgette turned to those about her. "I ask you all to

Grace Mandeville's laugh was not pleasant to hear.

"Yes, that's true. But how do they get their chance? By paying the orchestra for it. And it's worth it, no matter how much it costs. For after such an appearance you're pretty sure of getting paying engagements on the road. That is, if the New York critics are decent to you. And even if they're only half decent, their criticisms can be doctored up, and made to read like real puffs. That's done all the time. Just take out all the bad parts and connect up the rest—and there it is—a complete endorsement of you. Then you use it for an advertisement all over the country. You appeared with such and such a symphony orchestra, and here's what the critics said! Of course, your appearance wasn't at one of the subscription concerts, but on a popular program of some kind, and, as likely as not, with the assistant conductor. But that doesn't get around the country. You're advertised as having appeared with this or that great orchestra. That does the work. I wish I'd had a chance to get a hearing that way. But I never had money to pay for any sort of a New York appearance. You've got to have a rich backer to do that. I've never found one. It's easier if you're a singer. Rich people would so much rather be credited with having launched a singer than the best instrumentalist that was ever heard. And if you're an opera singer, and even half good-looking—well—that's easy."

Josephine looked so distressed that Grace added, good-naturedly:

"But don't let what I've said discourage you. It's the musicians that go ahead anyway, no matter how great the obstacles, that help the art. There's Georgette motioning to me. I expect she wants me at the tea table. I must leave you."

Hastings, who was standing near, came over and took the chair Grace had vacated.

"Why so sad, chérie? Has The Mandeville been giving you some of that 'the-world's-against-me' dope of hers? Let me give you the other side of the story. I've got the world just running after me."

Josephine laughed.

"That's right. Cheer up. You're too pretty to mope. Give you my word you look ripping in that blue dress. How's the music going?"

"Oh, pretty well. Do you know, you are the only pupil of Brandt's I've ever heard play? I heard you one day when I was waiting for a lesson. I thought at first it was Brandt himself. I didn't suppose any pupil could play like that. I was so thrilled!"

"Oh, I can thrill them all right. Always could. But you've got to do more than give them thrills, if you want to last. Brandt made me see that. But it took a long time for it to soak in. So you thought I couldn't be a pupil, because I played so damned well? That's some compliment. Thanks. Well, I may as well own up, I'm one of his star pupils. Been ahead of all of them the last three years, except the Tomek girl."

"Tomek! Why, that's the name of my harmony teacher!"

"Yes, she's the old geezer's daughter. You must have seen her. She takes a lesson nearly every day."

Josephine shook her head.

"No, I haven't seen her. I haven't seen any of the pupils or heard any but you. And I miss it terribly. At Jordan there was always so much going on at the conservatory. Pianists and violinists and 'cellists and singers all taking lessons in the different rooms at once. You could hear them even before you got in the building. And it was such fun to meet them in the halls and talk to them! The whole thing made you feel that everybody was interested in music. But it's so quiet at Brandt's. He takes

half an hour to himself between each lesson. The only person I've ever seen there carrying a music case is a girl I know can't be a pupil. She doesn't look the least bit musical."

"What's she like?"

"Oh, she's awfully uninteresting looking. She's rather tall, and has thick blond hair that's cut short. It makes her look so funny! And she's kind of thin, and has a big mouth and a broad face with such high cheekbones. Her skirts always hang down in the back and tip up on the sides, and she has the biggest feet. But her eyes are wonderful. Great big gray eyes."

"That's Povla Tomek all right," said Hastings, with a chuckle. "But you ought to see her in her white evening get-up. Looks as if she'd stepped out of a Norse legend."

"Is she one of Brandt's best pupils?" asked Josephine, amazed.

"You bet! If she keeps on as she's going now, she'll wipe the whole bunch of us off the map. Only nineteen, and has everything. Technic, temperament, brains. Plays the violin almost as well as the piano. Could teach harmony as well as old Tomek himself. Can speak half a dozen languages. Knows a lot about art and books. And she thinks she's only beginning to learn. Works like a slave. Brandt says if he can live long enough to hear her first concert, he'll die happy. Always held her up to me as a model. Felt sometimes as if I'd like to murder her. I've heard her play. Got The Koubek to let me sneak into the dining room many a time while she was taking a lesson. Always went home feeling like a pup. Lord! But she's the real thing! Wonder Brandt hasn't held her up to you as a model, too."

"He's never mentioned her to me," said Josephine, faintly.

Hastings yawned. "Hot enough here to roast a fellow. Guess I'll beat it. Ta-ta."

Josephine sat with her eyes lowered.

Povla Tomek was only nineteen, and Brandt held her up as a model! Even to Mr. Hastings! He'd never said a word to her about her. Did he think it wasn't worth while? He'd told her she might never be an artist, no matter how long she studied. He was crazy over the Tomek girl, and hoped he'd live to hear her first concert!

Well, she was going to have a first concert, too, sometime. She was going to surprise Brandt and all the rest of them. What difference did it make if that Tomek girl could speak so many languages, and play the violin, and know about books? That wouldn't help her any in playing the piano. And then you never could believe half that Mr. Hastings said, anyway. Now if Mr. Stanhope had told her——

She looked for him, and saw him sitting alone at the other side of the room.

Did he know Povla Tomek? She'd ask him the first chance she got. She wished he'd come and talk with her. He hadn't said a word to her all afternoon. She always felt better after she'd been with him. How kind he'd been that day in the park! She'd worked so much better since then. She hoped she could tell him so today. How bored he looked! But then, he didn't care much for this crowd. Then why had he come?

Eugénie, who had also been watching Stanhope, went up to him.

"You're in the dumps today, Winthrop. Let me prescribe a remedy based on the homeopathic theory that a dose of whatever causes illness will cure it. I'll bring Miss Prescott to you."

"If I wanted to talk with Miss Prescott, I shouldn't ask

her to come to me. I should go to her," said Stanhope, shortly.

Eugénie threw up her hands. "Stanhope turned the social pedant! The last milestone on the way to domesticity."

She laughed back at him as she walked away.

Stanhope fled from the room. How these people bored him with their flippant cleverness. Why had he gone this afternoon? Why? Well, he knew well enough. But it was madness. He would go away for months—perhaps for the entire year. If he stayed he would be constantly upset by this restlessness that had made life unendurable these past few days. There was the alternative of staying and trying to win her. The effort would ease his disquiet. But, no! Even if he won her, she could never find happiness with a man like him. The best part of her life was before her. The best part of his had been given to another woman. To stay, and try to keep matters as they were now, was impossible. When she knew how it was with him, it would be all over with their friendship. And she was bound to see. All his superior knowledge of the world, pitted against her lack of sophistication, her naïveté, would avail him nothing. For she was a woman. And when it came to matters of the heart, the most ingenuous woman was wiser than the wisest man.—Yes, he would go away.

Eugénie had reported Stanhope's departure to Georgette with the terse, "Winthrop's bolted."

Georgette shrugged her shoulders. "It's just as well. He's a regular kill-joy when he's with this crowd. All he came for today was to gaze on the ingénue. He's in love with her. That's as plain as daylight. Believe me, Fraggie, the riddle of the world isn't the sphinx or woman. It's man. After having had that tremendous affair with so brilliant a woman, Stanhope falls for a pretty-faced nobody. How can he be such a fool?"

"My dear, after a man has passed through the fiery furnace and come out badly singed, he is ready to sit beside the tame flame of the domestic hearth."

Georgette made a grimace.

"Heaven help him if he ever marries her! She honestly believes she's going to be a second Carreño."

CHAPTER XII

JOSEPHINE lay awake, restless, in her berth on the train that was carrying her back to Parksburg for the summer vacation. Home! And Aunt Mary! She could hardly wait. But Parksburg! No, she didn't want to go back to Parksburg. For everybody there would expect so much of her after a whole winter in New York with the great Brandt. And what had she to show them for her work? Nothing. She couldn't play as well as she did when she went away. She knew why, and was willing to work just as Brandt wanted her to, undoing so much, and beginning all over again. She was willing to do this because she'd been with a big teacher and with big people, and knew now that it took a lot of hard work to become an artist. But the people at home didn't know. They would expect so much!

Well, there was just one thing she wouldn't do. She wouldn't play for them. They'd expect her to give a recital and show off. Show off, indeed! Why, she couldn't even play the *Pathétique* any more. Nor hardly anything else she'd played at her benefit concert. Everything she'd played lately had sounded so dull and cold. And Brandt seemed to think the colder her playing was, the better.

But no matter. She had made up her mind after that time she was ill, that she'd do everything exactly as he said. He was a famous piano teacher, and if she worked just as he wanted her to, then it was his fault if she didn't get along fast enough to please Parksburg.

But she couldn't tell the people at home that. They wouldn't understand. She wouldn't understand either if she hadn't gone to New York and studied with a man like

Brandt and heard so many big things and met so many famous people.

How good Mr. Stanhope had been to her all winter! She didn't know what she'd have done without him. But lately he'd seemed different. He'd been kind—she didn't believe he could help being kind—but he'd been different. Probably he was tired of bothering to take her about and show her things. Such a famous man! He could know anybody in New York he wanted to. And he didn't seem to care much about knowing anyone.

She'd so wanted to tell him how she felt about going back to Parksburg. But, somehow, she couldn't tell anyone. Not even Miss Sothern. They all seemed to think she was going to have a lovely summer. And it would be lovely if she were coming home just like any other girl who'd been away. But it was different. And she was afraid.

What was the train stopping so long for? Why, they weren't at a station at all. They were in the country. Perhaps something had happened. There! They were starting again. How beautiful everything looked in the moonlight. And how peaceful.

Aunt Mary had written that Parksburg was having a boom. Well, she knew what that meant. Everybody getting excited and drilling for oil and losing all their money. Sam was excited, too. Aunt Mary had written that he spent all his time out at that field he'd bought from the Norrises. She knew how it would end. He'd lose every dollar he had, and get in debt, too. She'd always thought he was too smart to get excited over an oil boom in Parksburg.

It would be nice to see Sam again. That is, it would be nice if he was nice. But she could manage that. What long letters he'd written her! And always giving her advice. And he'd never said a word when her letters had got shorter and shorter. How could she write long letters to

Sam, with all she had to do in New York? But she'd have a lot to tell him about the people she'd met and the things she'd seen and heard. The very idea of his not liking New York! She adored it.

And Aunt Mary! Oh, it would be lovely to be with her again! She believed Aunt Mary would understand why she wasn't ready to show off before Parksburg. She'd always understood her. Dear Aunt Mary!

But how was she to get through a whole summer in Parksburg without making everybody feel disappointed about her? They mustn't be disappointed. No! She couldn't stand it to have them disappointed.

How hot it was in this stuffy berth! She used to think it would be such fun to travel in a sleeper. But she didn't like it a bit. If she could only get to sleep!

She wished she didn't have to go home. She wished she could have stayed in New York. But Miss Sothern was going to Paris next week. The apartment was rented for the summer. And, anyway, she couldn't have stayed there alone. Everybody she knew would be away. Most of them had gone already. Funny how crazy they'd all been to leave New York. And they all just loved it in the winter. Mr. Stanhope and Mr. Holbrooke were on their way to Norway now. They were going to take a walking trip there. She'd never heard of men who could afford to travel any way they wanted to, thinking it was fun to dress in old clothes and walk. And that nice Mr. Carlton—for he was nice, although he was so different—he was going to walk through the Berkshires. She wouldn't like that a bit. But she would like to go to Paris with Miss Sothern, or up to Maine, as Miss Fragonard was going to do, or live in a bungalow by the seashore with a lot of other girls, as Georgette Randolph and Grace Mandeville were planning.

Mr. Hastings was going to Europe, and expected to make

his début there before he came back. That would be wonderful. But it was time he made his début. He was thirty-two. He'd told her so. And she was only twenty. She would have a début long before she was thirty-two. Indeed she would. You'd never dream, to see Mr. Hastings or talk to him, that he could play so wonderfully. Mr. Stanhope had said you sometimes found such contradictions in artists. And he'd said he respected Mr. Hastings, because he was so absolutely sincere in his work. But she didn't like him a bit. He was so coarse. Novak was her ideal of how an artist ought to look and act.

She'd met him! The great Novak that New York had gone wild over. She'd heard him twice. He did play wonderfully, but he'd never thrilled her as some of the others could. But she'd been thrilled that day Brandt introduced her to him in the studio. There was something about his voice and the way he looked at you that made you feel you could never forget him. He'd talked to her all the time that Brandt was in the hall, telephoning. And he'd actually shaken hands with her when she left! Miss Fragonard had said she ought forever to keep that hand gloved. It would be profanation to let the common herd touch it.

Miss Fragonard was so brilliant. And sarcastic, too. She couldn't help liking her, though. But it had been real mean of her to make everybody laugh that last night at Miss Sothern's, by telling her she must send them copies of the Parksburg papers, with the story of her winter in New York. "For, of course, the papers will interview you," Miss Fragonard had said.

And she wouldn't be a bit surprised if the Parksburg *Journal* did try to interview her. Hadn't they had a lot in about her when she left? And wouldn't they want to make a fuss over her when she came back? Wouldn't everybody want to make a fuss over her? She wouldn't

be a bit surprised to see all the Ladies' Aid at the train to meet her. She wouldn't be surprised to see a big crowd there. They thought so much of her in Parksburg, and had been so wonderfully good to her. Oh, she wished she didn't have to come back until she could do something big for them! For they wouldn't understand! They wouldn't understand!

Throughout the night, Josephine, between fitful intervals of sleep, compared this homecoming with the triumphant return she had expected to make. And hourly her dread of meeting those who had made her winter with Brandt possible, increased.

But when, at noon the next day, the slow train to which she had changed stopped at Parksburg, she hurried down the steps with but one thought. Aunt Mary!

The next moment they were in each other's arms.

"Dear, dear Aunt Mary!"

"You darling! I've got you back again!"

Susie Hatfield and Althea Burnett and Daisy Miller seized hold of Josephine.

"We're here too, Josie!" exclaimed Susie.

But Josephine clung to Aunt Mary, half laughing, half crying.

"There, now," said Aunt Mary, unloosening the clinging arms. "We must give the rest a chance."

Then the trio fell upon Josephine with girlish endearments.

"Where's your trunk check?" asked Aunt Mary, briskly.

"You'll have to let go of me until I can get it," said Josephine to the girls.

She looked around. Why, there wasn't anyone else here to meet her! She hadn't wanted a crowd. But just the three girls——

She fumbled in her purse for the check. Why hadn't

Sam come? He would have seen to the trunk and driven them home.

"Hurry up," urged Aunt Mary. "If we're going to get Jim Blakely to take the trunk in his wagon, we'll have to be quick. He's so busy these days."

"I'll see to it."

"No, let me. I can do it quicker." Aunt Mary seized the check and ran into the little baggage room.

Josephine and the girls stood on the deserted platform, the girls all talking at once. How stylish she looked! She must tell them all about New York. They had a million questions to ask her! Had she given any concerts there? Had she brought home any new clothes? Was it true that shirtwaists were going out of style? Had she heard about the boom? Everybody in Parksburg was drilling for oil. There was such an excitement. She wouldn't know the place. It was just great to have so much going on. Mrs. Hunter said to tell her she'd have come to the train if her brother and his wife hadn't arrived this morning. Her brother was going to drill, too. Lots of people would have come to meet her, but everybody was so busy. When was she going back to New York? Had she been to many parties? Wasn't she excited when she first saw Broadway?

Aunt Mary came hurrying back from the baggage room.

"I caught Jim just in time. He says he'll take your satchel, too. Here he is."

Jim, in overalls and straw hat, held out a hand.

"How-d'ye do? Glad t'see y' back."

Josephine put her slender gloved hand in the big red one. "I'm so glad to see you, Jim. I haven't forgotten how you worked to sell tickets for my concert."

Jim looked sheepish. "Aw, that wa'n't nothin'. We was all downright proud t'help send you t' New York."

"I know," said Josephine, her face clouding.

"My land! Don't let's stand here and talk," protested Aunt Mary. "You've got to have your dinner. I left the meat in the oven." She drew Josephine's hand within her arm. "Come on, girls."

Josephine laughed. "Dear me, Aunt Mary, you've actually grown younger. I guess it's done you good to have me away."

"It's going to do me more good to have you back," came Aunt Mary's reply. "You've got to tell me everything about your music and what you've been doing." She looked at Josephine. "You're prettier than ever. But you're thin. Well, I'll fix that. I'll feed you up on the best that's to be had."

Josephine clasped Aunt Mary's arm with both hands. "Oh, it's so good to have you again. I've missed you terribly. I haven't had anyone to spoil me, and you know I just love to be spoiled."

"Well, if loving you is spoiling you, then you've been spoiled a long while."

They were walking alone, the girls following close behind. They had made their way around the station and across the dirt road into a side street which led into Main Street. The June sun was hot. The wind blew the dust in their faces.

"If the boom keeps up, all this road to the station's going to be paved, and the street car run down here," said Aunt Mary.

"If you wait for a boom to run the street car down here, I guess I'll have to walk to the station when I go back to New York. I know all about Parksburg booms."

"Well, this is going to be a real boom, or I miss my guess." Aunt Mary spoke emphatically.

"Doesn't Parksburg look good to you?" called Althea Burnett when they had turned into Main Street.

"Yes indeed," replied Josephine over her shoulder, while

at the same time she was thinking: "I'd forgotten everything was so small and cheap."

"Wait till you see the bank," said Aunt Mary, proudly. "They're putting on an addition. It'll be the highest building in town. Six stories."

"There's Sam!" exclaimed Susie Hatfield, grasping Josephine's arm. "My goodness! I believe the horse is running away!"

Down the street at a gallop came a bay mare drawing a high mud-splashed buggy, with Sam on the seat, sawing at the reins. He was on the opposite side of the street, and caught sight of Josephine as he passed. He pulled the horse up with a jerk and turned so quickly the buggy skidded on two wheels.

"Mercy!" screamed Aunt Mary.

Sam drew up to the curb and jumped out, the reins still in his hand. He was in flannel shirt, old trousers, high boots, and a wide hat set back on his head. The boots and trousers were caked with mud. His hands were grimy.

"Hello, Josie." His voice was tense, his eyes devouring. "I was hurrying to the train to get you. We're ready to blast our big well. I want you to drop the go-devil. Can't stop a minute. The men are waiting. Will you come?"

Josephine ran to him.

"Of course I'll come. Oh, how exciting! You don't mind, do you Aunt Mary?"

"I should say I don't mind. Go along. Don't stop to talk. I'll hold the dinner back."

"Wait till I turn out," said Sam, as Josephine started to climb over the wheel. But she was in while he was speaking. He jumped in after her. She waved her hand to the group on the sidewalk. "Good-by!" She turned to Sam:

"Oh, I'm so glad I got here in time!"

"So am I," replied Sam, with a ring in his voice.

They started up Main Street at such a pace there was no chance for talk. Josephine grasped the side of the buggy with one hand, her hat with the other. Sam had all he could do to manage the mare.

But, once outside the town, where the road was clear, and the mare had settled down to a steady pace, Sam asked:

"Well, how are you?"

She glanced up, but when she met his eyes she looked away, quickly.

"I'm all right. Sam, tell me about the well."

"It's the eighth I've drilled. We've struck oil from three of them. But nothing to amount to much. Everyone but Deacon Hatfield thinks I'm a fool to keep on. But if I can raise the money I'll keep on till the whole place is dug full of holes. Been drilling two wells lately. The one you're going to set off, and another in the center of the field. I left the men working at the center one. Isn't anything more to do to the other. Just waiting for you to drop the go-devil. Ought to have been set off an hour ago, so that we could get things in shape before dark if we happened to make any sort of a strike. But when I found they were ready to let her go, it just came into my head that I wanted you to set her off."

"It's going to be so thrilling to drop the go-devil!"

Josephine had often seen the cylindrical piece of iron dropped into a well to set off the dynamite that had been lowered into the hole when the drilling was completed. And she had seen many a go-devil dropped, and nothing come of it but dirt and stones and a thin stream of oil, and often not even the oil. If she could only bring luck to Sam today!

As they came in sight of the Norris farm, she exclaimed:

"Just look at the derricks! I'd never have known the place!"

"The well you're going to set off is at the far end," said Sam. "The other one's where those men are working. That's going to be ready in a few days. I don't expect much from it, though. Do you see those derricks off there in the distance over at the right? That's where Mathew Hoover struck two good wells last week."

But Josephine had not looked. She was staring at the men, who, an instant before, had been working about the well in the center of Sam's field. Now they were running wildly toward the road, waving their arms and shouting.

"Sam! Something's happened! Look at the men! Oh, what's that?"

There was an ominous rumble, followed by a violent hissing. The derrick in the middle of Sam's field was hurled into the air and shattered to fragments. Then, with a terrific explosion, a column of oil shot from the well, carrying with it piping and pieces of rock. With a deafening roar the black geyser rose skyward.

The mare reared and backed. Sam braced himself and pulled her down. He sat, speechless, staring.

Josephine grasped his arm.

"You've struck a gusher! Oh, Sam! Sam!"

Her voice was lost in the roar.

Sam came to himself with a start. He jerked the whip from the socket and cut the mare. She plunged forward.

They covered the short distance to the Norris farm through a thick spray of oil. As they stopped, a man sprang to the mare's head. Sam was out of the buggy with a leap. Josephine jumped down after him.

"Run into the Norrises!" he shouted. She understood only by the motion of his lips.

Sam vaulted the fence and ran with the men around the

edge of the field to get near the well from the other side, for the wind was blowing the oil in their direction.

Josephine stood spellbound, her eyes on the gusher. She was unmindful of the terrifying roar, or of the lake of oil that was rapidly covering the ground and creeping toward her.

It was Sam who had struck it! Sam!

She turned, at last, and saw in the distance people coming from every direction. Some in buggies and wagons. Others running along the road and across the fields.

There had been no need to spread the news that a gusher was struck.

The first to arrive was Deacon Hatfield, his horse flecked with foam. He threw the reins to the man at his side, as he sprang to the ground. His lean face was crimson, his beard bristling. He ran to the man who was holding Sam's horse, and, making a trumpet of his hands, shouted in his ear:

"God Almighty! It's a record-breaker! Where's Sterling?"

The man stood, gaping.

"Y' gol-durned fool!" yelled the deacon. "Are y' deaf?"

Josephine rushed to him. He transferred the trumpet to her ear.

"Hi, Sis! Where's Sam'l? Dammit! He'll lose a million if suthin' ain't done quick!"

Josephine motioned frantically toward the far end of the field. The deacon sprang over the fence like a boy and was off on a run.

Josephine started after him, then stopped at the fence. What was Sam doing? Could he save the oil? Oh, he must save it!

She tried to catch sight of him. The spray from the gusher beat in her face. Suddenly she realized she was drenched. With a gasp, she fled to the Norris house.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Sterling Strike, as the gusher was named, made Sam a rich man overnight, and placed him on the front page of the newspapers throughout the country.

"I tell ye, Sam'l, ye've put th' town on th' map in capital letters," said the deacon.

And it was so.

Oil producers, land speculators, drillers, day laborers, and curiosity seekers, swarmed into Parksburg. Land soared to fabulous prices. The Norris farm, which, before the gusher was struck, would not have brought \$100 an acre, sold before the week was out for \$60,000 an acre and with more buyers than there was land to sell.

The clerk of the Metropole Hotel, who, the day the strike was made, was extending a smiling welcome to guests at \$2.50 per day—meals included—had now acquired a chill stare.

"Nothing left. May be a vacancy, second floor back, by the end of the week. Twenty-five a day. Or you can have a cot in the hall at \$10 a night and no meals."

An oil magnate secured an option on a room with a deposit of \$100, and considered himself lucky to sleep in the hall in the meantime.

Houses were thrown open to roomers at prices rivalling the Metropole, and every house filled to the roof, with the exception of the few that were closed to this horde of money-seekers, who created indescribable confusion wherever they went. And still there were thousands without a place to lay their heads. The speculators bought or leased vacant land, and houses went up with miraculous rapidity. Cheap houses, without paint or plaster, and every

room taken before a nail was driven. Innumerable shacks and tents appeared in the outlying districts. And still the crowds continued to arrive.

The gusher was steadily yielding 35,000 barrels a day. "And cleaner oil never shot from God's earth," affirmed the deacon.

"If it hadn't been for you," said Sam, "she'd still be running wild. I wouldn't have known, any more than a baby, what to do with such a ripper."

"Aw, I didn't do much," replied the deacon, who had done everything. He chuckled: "It wuz worth th' work. Haven't had sech a chance t'cuss sense I wuz a driller."

The deacon had taken full command of the efforts to get the gusher under control. Every order was punctuated with an oath. And every order was a masterpiece of efficiency. Ditches were dug to catch the oil. Pipes were laid from these improvised reservoirs to the Hatfield tanks, which were soon filled to overflowing. Materials for building new tanks were rushed to the field. In the meantime appeared representatives of the Monarch Oil Company, with an offer to buy all the oil the entire field produced and attend to its tankage and transportation. They named a royalty price that made Sam's head swim. But he demurred. He was for managing the yield himself. The deacon explained, in terse but lurid language, that it would take immense capital and the biggest experts in the country, to get the oil to market. Sam grasped the situation with the keen insight of the born business man. He signed his contract with the Monarch.

The next morning the *Parksburg Journal* devoted the entire first page to the news. At the top of the page appeared Sam's picture, with the president of the Monarch Oil Company at his right and the manager at his left. The heavy black headlines carried the prophecy that if the

gusher kept going three months at its present rate, Samuel Sterling would be a multi-millionaire.

From the hour the gusher was struck, Parksburg had treated Sam as a hero. Now the whole town set about to put its hero on a pedestal.

But Sam refused to assume the rôle of hero. Although dazed by his good fortune, he kept his head. He was seldom seen on the streets, except in his high buggy, driving the mare at a rapid pace. When besieged by invitations, his excuse was always, "Too busy." When business men who hoped to use him as a stepping-stone, or scheming mothers who saw in him an ideal son-in-law, succeeded in cornering him, they found him so nearly the Sam Sterling they had always known that they were disappointed. They wanted the hero to look and act his part. Only a few in the town felt the new force in him, saw it in his eyes, heard it in his voice.

And the less the town saw of Sam, the more it talked of him. Men discussed him over the counter, in groups on the street, at the bar of the Metropole, in drug stores, saloons, churches, restaurants. The women found in him a never-ending source of gossip. It was Sam Sterling this, and Sam Sterling that, from the favored ones who were admitted to the intimacy of the Hunter home, to the washerwomen who talked across the back fence as they hung out the clothes. And they one and all asked, would he want to marry Josie Prescott, now he was rich enough to have his pick of the best anywhere?

Would Sam Sterling want to marry Josie Prescott? That was the only thought Parksburg gave to Josephine these days. The *Journal* continued to publish columns about the gusher, Sam, the boom. But no mention was made of the significant fact that the musical genius of the town had returned to spend the summer in Parksburg, after a winter in New York with the great Anton Brandt. When Jose-

phine went out she was lost in the crowds of strangers. And when she happened to come across someone she knew, it was, "Hello, Josie! So you're back?" or, "Well, when did you get home?" And everywhere she went, she heard the name of Sam Sterling.

And she was glad. Glad for herself and for him. She felt that the gusher had brought her as much good luck as it had brought Sam. And she enjoyed her obscurity as much as she enjoyed his prominence.

She was proud of Sam. Proud of the way he bore himself in the glare of sudden fame. Of his refusal to be lionized. Of every line written about him. Of all the spoken praise.

But she could not adjust herself to the thought of Sam as a rich man. Perhaps, of all the people in Parksburg, no one was more bewildered by the contemplation of Sam Sterling as a coming millionaire than was Josephine. Sam had always been part of her life. For the past few years she had known that he wanted to be more than the friend. She had grown to take his devotion for granted. Something to fill her life in just the measure she desired and no more. She had thought of him with affection, but, unconsciously, with patronage. She was talented, and had a big future. Sam was just Sam Sterling, who would always be satisfied to run his little dry-goods store.

And now the Sam that Josephine saw was a young man of wealth, run after by the whole of Parksburg, dined by the Monarch Oil Company, besieged by men who offered him enticing returns if he would let them invest his money, commented upon by newspapers as a sensation in the oil world, and throughout it all, proving that he was bigger than his good fortune.

He had taken her out to see the gusher after it was brought under control, and the great tanks the Monarch was putting up—one every forty-eight hours—to hold the

oil. She was thrilled when they reached the spot from which they had seen the explosion, and exclaimed that it was something she would never forget as long as she lived.

Sam wanted to say that his fortune would mean little to him without her to share it. But he knew it was not the time to speak what had been in the back of his mind during all the excitement of these amazing days.

They met Deacon Hatfield as they were walking about the field, and the deacon said, with a twinkle in his eye:

"Wall, Sis, y' got baptized in Sam'l's money th' day th' gusher cut loose, didn't ye? An' it wa'n't no sprinklin' baptism, neither, but a reg'lar soaked-to-th'-skin Baptist kind. Eh?"

Josephine flushed, but Sam only laughed. He was feeling more at ease with her these days than he had felt in years. The sense of power which comes with money gave him a firmness that enabled him to hide the lover beneath the friend. He knew that the owner of the Sterling Strike had more to offer a beautiful talented girl than a partner in a small dry-goods store. The consideration of his money as a direct means of winning her was not in his thoughts. But with all his soul he longed for the privilege of lavishing it on her.

It was too bad about the dress and other things, Sam had said, later. Didn't suppose she could ever wear them again, could she? Josephine assured him that she wouldn't have missed being there when the gusher went off for all the clothes in the whole world.

She knew Sam was worried about the ruined suit and hat and shoes. But she little knew how he chafed under the thought that he couldn't offer to buy her new ones. On the contrary, he was so matter-of-fact, she felt that he had changed his mind about wanting to marry her. And she liked him much better this way, she told herself.

for with Susie it was the real thing so far as Sam was concerned—exclaimed:

“I bet you’ll marry Mr. Stanhope!”

Josephine replied, pointedly, that she didn’t expect to marry anyone for years and years.

The girls wondered—was she just trying to fool them, or did she really mean it?

They heard much about Brandt, and Hastings, and Eugénie, and Georgette, and the young man who wrote plays. The girls were interested in Carlton when they found that he was young and good-looking and popular. Had Josie heard from him? they asked, with strong emphasis on the pronoun. Did she have his picture? No, she hadn’t heard, and didn’t have his picture. Why not? Because she didn’t know Mr. Carlton that well. Eugénie Fragonard shocked but fascinated them. Josephine could mimic her to the life; shrug, voice, gesture. Her description of The Koubek sent them into peals of laughter. But when it came to Brandt, Josephine presented him always as the glorious Master. Of him they soon tired. When, with pride, she told them she had met the great Novak, they asked who was Novak?

But after a time the girls sought Josephine less frequently. She was always practicing, they complained. And she wouldn’t ever play for them. The girls, on the other hand, bored Josephine. She reproached herself for this. They were such nice girls. But they weren’t interested in the things she cared for most. You’d think, from the questions they asked, that she’d gone to New York to find out about the latest styles, and to go to parties and meet young men. And she hadn’t had time to think of styles. Nor had she been to any parties. They wouldn’t call those teas, parties. They’d think they were stupid, just nothing but talk, no dancing or games. But she’d enjoyed them more than all the parties she’d ever been to in Parksburg. Parksburg

parties! They certainly were stupid. And the Parksburg young men were stupid, except Sam, of course. You could never call Sam stupid. He was just as smart as any of the men she'd met in New York. Only he wasn't as educated as they were. She hoped the girls wouldn't think she was putting on airs because she didn't want to go around with them all the time. She couldn't do it, even if she enjoyed it, for there was her music. And there was Aunt Mary. When she wasn't practicing, she wanted to be with her.

But Aunt Mary was so busy, always running down town for one thing or another. You'd think she'd struck an oil well herself. She was glad Aunt Mary had refused to take any roomers. She'd said she wouldn't have their summer together spoiled that way. They were going to have the house all to themselves. Well, they were having some cozy times together. And doing some reading, too. She wanted to read a lot this summer. Dr. Jewett had said he would lend her some books. But even Dr. Jewett was so busy you could hardly get a chance to see him. Perhaps he was drilling for oil, too. Sam had told her, as a secret, that he was going to fix Uncle Jewett so he could retire whenever he wanted to. And he was going to build a house for his mother and sister, and have a tiled bathroom and electric lights. And he wasn't going to let his mother stand over the hot stove cooking any more meals for him. They were going to have a hired girl. Well, it was lovely to have money to do such nice things for people. But she didn't care for money for herself. All she wanted was just enough to live in New York and study until she became a famous artist. It was going to take a lot to do that. She hardly had enough for another winter, even with the allowance Aunt Mary had said she was going to give her. But, never mind. She'd find a way. Worry? No indeed! Just think how she'd worried about Parksburg making a fuss over her this summer! And nobody but the girls had

paid any attention to her. She'd never worry about anything again as long as she lived.

But gradually, as Parksburg became accustomed to the boom, it began to remember that its protégée had returned from New York for the summer. Then came a day when Mrs. Hunter called on Josephine and invited her to meet the Ladies' Aid and other of her women patrons, at her home.

"We expected to have you give a concert," Mrs. Hunter explained, apologetically. "But everybody's so busy. The next time you come home the new opera house will be finished, and you can give it there. Mr. Hunter's the biggest stockholder, and it's to be called the Hunter Opera House. It's going to be beautiful. Nothing like it in this part of the state. I wish you could open it with a concert. But you'll play for us on Thursday afternoon. I'm sorry I can't get the piano tuned. I always have it tuned once a year, after the furnace is out. It does seem extravagant, but when you have a good thing I believe in keeping it in order. But I put the tuning off this spring. And now, in this rush, you can't get anything like that done."

Josephine said yes, she would play. She knew that if she refused, the Ladies' Aid would never forgive her.

And she went to Mrs. Hunter's and played on the out-of-tune piano and knew she had never played so badly. But the women were delighted. How she had improved! They'd never heard her play so magnificently! It was too bad they couldn't have the concert. Had she made her plans about her New York début? "I'm going to be there," said Mrs. Hunter.

Then Josephine realized that Parksburg would never know whether she played well or whether she played badly. All that Parksburg would ever understand about her music would be that she had become famous through the town's

money. If she didn't become famous, they would find no excuse for her failure.

From that day she ceased to measure herself according to the confidence Parksburg showed in her—or even the confidence Jordan had showed. Experience had quickly taught her a truth that she would have been slow to comprehend through advice—the truth that to measure her ability by the commendation of those who did not understand was a false standard of judgment; that praise is valuable only in proportion to the intelligence of those who bestow it.

She thought of Povla Tomek, who knew so much yet felt she was only a beginner. That was because she had always lived among people who knew more than she did. She thought of Hastings, who had gone to Brandt to be finished and had studied with him nine years without getting discouraged. That was because he had seen enough of big people to know that Brandt was right and he was wrong. She thought of Novak, who had stopped giving concerts while he was having such great success, and had worked for years before he appeared in public again. That was because he knew that the people who raved over him were the people who didn't understand. Because he knew he had been carried away by foolish praise.

"And I have been carried away by foolish praise," thought Josephine. "Everybody here and at Jordan and everywhere else I played before I went to New York said I was wonderful. But—in New York—everybody criticized me. And I thought they didn't know how well I played, and that everybody at home did. Why, not a soul in Parksburg has the least idea what beautiful playing really is! All those ladies at Mrs. Hunter's actually thought I played magnificently. And, oh, I played awfully!"

She took up her practicing with the firm determination

to forget the foolish praise of Parksburg and remember only Brandt's criticisms. Her hours of discouragement were caused less by the results she failed to attain than by the thought of what she might have become by now if she had been brought up among big people and had a big teacher all her life like Povla Tomek. She was just as talented as Povla Tomek! But she hadn't had the same chance. If Povla Tomek had been brought up in a small town and been praised all the time, and never had a teacher like Brandt until she was nearly twenty, what would she be like today? But, no, she wouldn't think about Povla Tomek. She would just work and work and—sometime—she would show them all that she could play like an artist!

She longed for the day when she could return to New York. She was bored by the constant talk about how many wells had been drilled. How much money this one had lost—that one made. How many houses built. How many new streets opened. The one thing that kept her interest in the boom was the persistent effort made to drain the Sterling Strike. She had seen the row of derricks erected all around the field, just over the dividing line. She knew that these wells had been drilled with the hope of striking the same vein that fed the gusher. And she knew that if the vein was struck the gusher would diminish. But the weeks passed, and the vein was not tapped. She was exultant. She wanted Sam to have it all. He deserved it.

Her practicing dragged. It was discouraging to keep at it so long without any lessons. There wasn't a single thing in Parksburg to inspire her. And it was inspiring in New York all the time. Just to see the city thrilled her. Fifth Avenue and Broadway and Central Park and Riverside Drive! She wouldn't spend her life in a town like Parksburg for all the money in the world.

She talked to Aunt Mary by the hour about the wonders of New York, the places she had seen, the things she had heard, the people she had met. She got out all her concert programs and her few opera programs, and tried to make Aunt Mary feel the thrills she had felt when she heard this or that artist. It was when she told about the operas that she grew most eloquent. She had been enraptured over the few performances she had heard. As she looked over the programs, she determined that she would go oftener next winter, if she had to stand up every time.

She tried to tell Aunt Mary that she would have to study more than two winters with Brandt, but found it impossible to make the confession. Before she came home she felt sure that Aunt Mary would understand. But now she was not so sure. Aunt Mary didn't seem a bit enthusiastic about her going back to New York. No, she couldn't tell her now. And, anyway, wouldn't it be better to wait and see how the lessons went this year? She was sure she would make great progress.

In August came a letter from Alice Sothern that, as Josephine expressed it, "knocked the breath out of her." The letter conveyed the news that by the time Josephine received it the writer would be Mrs. Holbrooke. They were to spend the winter in Italy, Alice went on to say, and then followed detailed suggestions as to Josephine's finding another home in New York.

Josephine's astonishment over the marriage delayed consideration of her own predicament. Why, she'd never dreamed there was anything like that between Miss Sothern and Mr. Holbrooke. The very idea of her marrying that old stiffy! Of course he was a famous painter, and there was a lot about him in the papers last spring when he had that exhibition of his pictures. But he was so cold and formal. Now if she had married Mr. Stanhope there would

be some sense in it. He was so interesting and kind, and witty, too. But Mr. Holbrooke—well, of all things!

The next day came a letter from Georgette. "Of course you've heard about Alice, and weren't at all surprised. It was so plain to everybody last winter."

Then Georgette proposed that Josephine come to live with her and Grace. There would be plenty of room. Grace was to be away more than half the time. It would be a very economical way for Josephine to live. And so on.

Josephine thought this wouldn't be as nice as living with Alice Sothern, but it would be much nicer than living with strangers. But Aunt Mary was not so easily convinced. Who was this slangy Georgette Randolph? she asked with unaccustomed severity. Had Georgette heard Josephine's answer, she would have disowned the portrait as unworthy of her worldliness. But it mollified Aunt Mary, who finally agreed with Josephine that it was better to be with someone she had known last winter than with strangers.

A few days before Josephine was to leave, Sam called late in the afternoon with a package under his arm.

"My, but you look slick!" said Aunt Mary, as he came into the sitting room.

And Sam, in his new suit, the trousers freshly creased, with his immaculate linen and clean-shaven face, did look "slick." The hours spent with the well-groomed representatives of the Monarch Oil Company had brought him more than financial returns. He could always go about looking just as neat as they looked, he told himself. And he was proving it, even to the point of never being seen on the street with his coat open.

"You look stunning," said Josephine, whole-heartedly.

Sam reddened beneath his tan. He handed her the package.

"I wanted you to have something to make you remember when you first saw the gusher, Josie," said he, gravely.

As she took the package, she looked at him, surprised.

"But, Sam, I could never forget when I first saw it. Never!"

"Well, you can call it a souvenir, then."

"Why, Sam, how—how nice of you!" She laid the package on the center table. "What can it be? It's so heavy."

She began to untie it. Aunt Mary slipped from the room. She knew what it was!

"Let me do it," said Sam. He untied the knot and drew off the string.

Josephine unfolded the wrapping. Her long-drawn "Oh!" as she saw the gift set Sam's pulse beating hard.

Three volumes of sonatas, bound in limp leather, and with BEETHOVEN in hand-tooled gold letters on each cover.

"Why, Sam!" was all she could say.

Sam did not speak for a moment. Then he said, with an embarrassed laugh:

"I knew you liked that fellow's music. So I ordered those bound for you special. Got them from New York. Told them to do them up in their best style, and I guess they did."

"Oh, Sam! How dear of you! They're beautiful! Just as beautiful as the music!"

At the bottom of the inside cover of each volume, she found her name in small gold letters. And, underneath, the date the gusher was struck.

She did not speak for fear she would cry. She could not look at Sam. But she felt the force of him as he stood by her side, looking down at her. After a time he said:

"I thought the thing you'd like best would be something you could use with your music, because you like that more than you like anything or anybody."

Josephine flushed, vividly. She ran to the door through which Aunt Mary had disappeared, and called:

"Oh, Aunt Mary, come quick and see my beautiful present."

And Aunt Mary came and saw the present she had seen the day it reached Sam. Yes, they were beautiful, she said; and looked at Sam understandingly. She knew what he'd really wanted to give Josie. Well, the diamond would come later.

"They'll make me work harder than ever to play Beethoven!" exclaimed Josephine.

"You've played Beethoven for years," said Aunt Mary. "Didn't you play the Pathetic Sonata at your benefit?"

"Yes, but—well—sometime I'm going to play it much better than I did then."

"You played it good enough to satisfy this town," was Aunt Mary's reply.

Josephine wanted to say that it was easy enough to please Parksburg, but held the words back. She turned to Sam. It was a perfect gift. She couldn't tell him how much she thanked him.

At this point Sam suggested that it was pretty warm indoors. Suppose they go out on the porch. So they went out on the porch and sat on the top step, and Aunt Mary took her sewing and sat by the open window, watching them.

Josephine leaned against a post, her hands clasped behind her head. She wore a pink lawn with round neck and half-length sleeves that fell away from her raised arms. Sam sat facing her, also leaning against a post.

"Guess Parksburg hasn't agreed with you any too well, Josie. You look tired."

"Of course I'm tired, with the whole town upset all summer. I never saw such an excitement. Broadway will seem restful after Main Street. But it's been great to be

here during the boom. Oh, Sam, I'll never be able to make Parksburg as famous as the gusher has made it!"

"Humph! I don't know about that. How long you going to study with that fellow in New York?"

"I'm going to study until he says I'm an artist."

Sam settled himself more comfortably against the post. He had the look of a man who knows what he wants and intends to go after it.

"I suppose you're anxious to get back to those friends of yours there," said he, casually.

"Yes, indeed. Of course I don't know much about the things they're interested in—books and the theater and pictures. I felt like a little stupid when I first met them. But I don't feel a bit that way now. They've all been so nice to me, and I've learned so much from them. Mr. Stanhope gave me some splendid books to read. But I was too busy with my music to read very much. I thought I'd read a lot this summer, but I felt the excitement even when I was shut up in the house all by myself. I read *Les Misérables* last winter. It's the most wonderful novel. I got so excited over it I couldn't sleep. Have you read it?"

"Nope."

"Well, you must read it, Sam. I got it from the library. Mr. Stanhope couldn't lend me his copy because it's in French. Think of being able to read French novels without having them translated!"

"Plain English is good enough for me."

"I used to talk that way, too, before I went to New York. But I don't now. Why, nearly all the people I know there speak French just as easily as they do English! Mr. Stanhope and Mr. Carlton and Mr. Hastings and Miss Sothern and Miss Fragonard. But Georgette Randolph doesn't. Perhaps she and I can study French together this winter. I'd love it."

Sam leaned forward.

"Say, Josie, you'll always think of Parksburg as your home, won't you?"

She laughed, nervously. "Of course I'll always think of it as my home. Don't be a goose."

Sam leaned back again and clasped his knees with his hands.

"Heard about the new opera house, I suppose. Hunter wanted me to go in on it, but I held off. Got too queer a mixture of stockholders to suit me. Anyway, Parksburg needs a new hotel before it has a new opera house. May build one myself."

Josephine's eyes sparkled. "Sam! You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I've been thinking of it. But I'll stay off of it for a while. No telling how long the gusher will hold out."

"But the *Journal* said yesterday it was still going at the rate of 20,000 barrels a day."

"Yes, but she won't keep that up much longer, I expect."

"Well, if it stopped today and never gave another drop of oil, I guess you could still build the hotel if you wanted to. I'm so glad for you, Sam, that you've made all that money! I'm sure there isn't anyone in Parksburg who'd use it as well as you can. Most young men would have done a lot of crazy things as soon as they'd got the first few thousands. But you've been so sensible and fine about it."

"Don't know as that's much of a compliment. I rather like a fellow who can cut loose once in a while."

"If you ever do cut loose," laughed Josephine, "I'd like to be around to see you do it. I can't imagine you different from the way you've always been."

"When I do take a fling, it'll have to be in New York. That's what is expected of a greenhorn with a few extra thousands, isn't it?"

"Goodness! You could never make a fool of yourself like that. But, really, now, what are you going to do?"

"Well, I know one thing I'm not going to do. I'm never going to stand behind a dry-goods counter again. But I'm not worrying about how to keep myself busy. This town needs a lot of improvements. May try getting the people interested along that line. They're talking now of getting me to run for mayor. Think I'll do it. May lead to something bigger. Always was interested in politics, you know."

"Don't I know! You tried hard enough to beat them into my head. But it wasn't big enough to hold politics."

As they talked, Josephine was wondering. How different Sam was! She'd always been able to wind him around her finger. But—well—he was different now.

"When you leave," said he, "just depend on me to get you to the station. And I'll see about the trunk, too."

She said that would be so good of him. And as she spoke, she was remembering how, a year ago, he had said he couldn't stand it to go to the train to see her off.

Aunt Mary, sitting by the window, smiled knowingly. "He's making her think he's not as anxious as he was," she said to herself. "If he keeps that up, he'll get her."

CHAPTER XIV

LONG before the hour set for Carnegie Hall to open for the third New York recital of Jan Novak's second American season, the line that waited to buy standing room stretched from the doors, along Fifty-seventh Street and for half a block down Seventh Avenue. The raw December wind, with occasional gusts of sleet, was endured patiently. The recompense was to come.

Soon after the doors were opened throngs began to arrive from all sides. Hundreds sat impatiently in carriages that made but slow and halting progress toward the entrance. The narrow foyer was jammed with a crowd that pressed slowly into the auditorium, while another crowd, seemingly endless, pushed its way from the sidewalk up the steps. The steady hum of talk was in a conglomeration of tongues.

One of the last to arrive was Josephine. She made her way lightly up the steps, through disappointed groups who had been unable to get in. She wore a dark trim suit and a soft white felt hat with the rim rolled high on one side, on the other shadowing her hair. A cluster of pink roses, tied with delicate green gauze, was pinned on her fur scarf. Entering the auditorium, she made her way to the right aisle, and, seeing the usher was near the stage, went to him as if she knew the location of her seat. He looked at her doubtfully as he took her ticket. There seemed not a vacant seat left. It was the center of the third row, she told him. He gave her a second glance as he tore the check and handed her a program. She passed those who had grudgingly risen to admit her with such a bright smile that more than one smiled in return.

Seated, she removed her hat and slipped out of her coat. As she drew the fur scarf about her shoulders, she lifted the roses to her face.

With clasped hands she waited, her eyes on the door through which Novak would appear.

When he came, she did not join in the long demonstration that greeted him. As he stood, waiting for the house to grow quiet, he gave her a veiled glance. The look she gave back was reverent. Nor did it change while he played. Nor did she move when, at the close, he came back again and again, bowing always with the aloof courtesy that but made the audience the more responsive.

At last the applause ceased. After a brief wait Novak returned. This time, when his glance sought Josephine, it was with the suggestion of a smile. She leaned forward, her lips parted, the reverence in her eyes deepening.

When silence had settled over the house, he glanced toward the accompanist. Then came the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Never had his listeners heard him play with greater eloquence or with more compelling inspiration. And, throughout all, his face was impassive, his pose firm.

During the repeated recalls, Josephine watched him with rapturous eyes. After he had gone, exaltation possessed her. Yet it was not his music that had wrought this ecstasy. How he had played she realized but vaguely. Her one thought was—he wanted to see her when he played.

She sat among the crowd of chattering thousands, her thoughts as remote from them as if she were alone.

It had been wonderful that first time she had come to hear him as his guest and sat in this very seat. Afterward he had told her that to look at her as he played made him forget the dull thousands who dragged down his soul through their superficial adulation. She must be there before him at his next recital, to inspire! Then he had gone

away on a tour, and she thought he had forgotten. But, oh, he had not forgotten! This morning the ticket had come in the envelope, tied to the bunch of roses. Not a word. Not even his name. But she knew!

She looked down at the flowers, her eyes warm with happiness. And the hat! She laid a hand on it, gently.

That was the first day they had been together—the day she bought the hat. How thrilled she was when he had met her as she was leaving Brandt's after a lesson, and said he had intended to call on Brandt, but would rather walk home with her. And when she had told him she wasn't going home, that she was going to buy a hat, he had said he would go with her. He knew just the kind of hat she ought to wear. He would select it. She had thought he was joking. But he wasn't joking. He meant it. She had intended to go to some department store and get an inexpensive dark hat. But, as they were walking through one of the cross streets, he saw this white felt in the window of a little French millinery shop. That was the hat for her, he had said. And they were in the shop almost before she knew it. . . . He had ordered the milliner to bring the hat. And then the woman began to talk French to him. She had seemed crazy over Novak, but had looked at her—well—rather queerly. When she took off her old hat, and the milliner started to put this one on, Novak had said he would put it on her himself. And he fitted it on her head in just the way he wanted her to wear it. He said it made her hair a web of fascination—and that her dark eyes under the white brim—but, of course, that was just his foreign way of paying compliments. . . . How frightened she was when she found how much the hat cost! But she'd have bought it no matter what it cost. How lucky that she'd taken the money to pay Brandt that morning, and had forgotten to leave it! You always left it in an envelope on the hall table. But she'd met

that Tomek girl in the hall, and that made her forget the money. She'd liked the Tomek girl ever since. And she tore the envelope open in her bag, so that Novak wouldn't suspect, and paid for the hat. And he said she must wear it home. Let Madame Fantin deliver the old one. Then he had taken her to Maillard's and bought her that gorgeous box of candy. It was in the bottom of her trunk now. It seemed too precious to eat. . . . And then he walked home with her. And when he left her at the door of the apartment, he said she must always wear the hat when she went out; for a good fairy might bring him her way again at any time—who could tell?—and he would want to see her coming toward him wearing the hat he had chosen.

The hat he had chosen! The great Novak!

Josephine ran her hand back and forth over the soft felt, her eyes glowing.

He knew she had never left the house since that day without wearing it. Not even when he was on tour. And they had met five times. The third time she knew that he had planned his walk to meet her. And before he had left her he told her that it wasn't a good fairy that had brought him her way, but his own desire. . . . And he said she always seemed to him like a little masterpiece of lyric music! . . . And then, the next time, he had given her a ticket for his recital. And when she saw him two days later, he told her how she had inspired him. She would never forget that moment. She would never forget a single moment she had been with him. There was something sacred in having him for a friend. That was why she couldn't tell anyone about it.

The house broke into sudden tumult. Josephine looked up. Novak was standing at the footlights, tall, slender, the splendid head thrown back, the violin and bow held at his side.

She caught her breath. He was wonderful!

He did not look at her until he played his own arrangement of an old Italian air. Then his glance went to her.

She was caught in a swirl of intoxicating happiness. He had put it on the program for her! Just for her!

She could not listen. She could only gaze, enchanted.

The rest of the recital was a confusion of sensations. The applause swept over her. She knew that the people were standing up and waving their handkerchiefs. That flowers had been thrown from a box to Novak's feet. She heard the cries of "Bravo!" "Bis!" "Encore!" She heard the woman next to her counting the recalls—twelve—thirteen—fourteen. She saw Novak come to the stage again and again. But it was all a blur.

At last a man appeared and closed the piano. The lights on the stage went out.

The disturbance, as those about her began to put on their wraps, brought her to herself. She stood up, slipped on her coat and put on her hat. She looked around at the mass of people filling the lower floor, the boxes, the galleries. And she smiled. What would they say if they knew that the great Novak had been inspired because she was there where he could see her!

She waited until the house was nearly empty. Then she drew the fur about her, lifted the flowers to her face, and went slowly up the aisle.

When she entered the foyer, Eugénie Fragonard came up to her.

"No need to ask how you enjoyed it. Your eyes proclaim your rapture."

Josephine smiled, faintly. She did not want to talk to Miss Fragonard now. Nor to anyone.

"I didn't know you were here," she said.

"I miss a Novak recital?"

Josephine made her way through the crowd to the door,

closely followed by Eugénie, who, as soon as they were outside the hall, asked:

"Are you walking home?"

"Yes."

"Then, as it has cleared off so beautifully, I'll walk part way with you. I need the air. Didn't get up until one o'clock. Was at a masked ball at the Beaux Arts last night. Such a riot! I was a wreck when it was over. Nothing but a Novak recital would have got me out of bed until evening." Eugénie slipped her arm through Josephine's as they reached the sidewalk. "Heavens, what a jam! Waiting for their carriages. I always come to Carnegie with *hoi polloi*. So much easier to get away. Here we are at Seventh Avenue. Let us turn down. I wouldn't cross the street between those horses for a kingdom."

They turned into Seventh Avenue. Eugénie withdrew her arm to adjust her hat and veil.

"Tell me, child, have I resumed my natural appearance?"

Josephine glanced at her. "You look all right."

Eugénie laughed. "I have never aspired to look all right."

Josephine did not seem to hear.

"Your hat looks as if you had put it on with the greatest care," said Eugénie, when they had passed beyond the crowd. "But I would never say you look 'all right' in it. Rather would I say you look ravishing. Beware, my dear! That dark hair, those eyes, under that white brim! Too fascinating for any but a blind man to resist. Who is your milliner? I must see if she can do as much for me."

The flush that had come to Josephine's face deepened to crimson. Eugénie gave her no chance to speak.

"And the roses! They must have been sent by one who knows you well, for they suit you perfectly. No doubt our young Parksburg millionaire."

"Oh, no!"

"Why shouldn't I think he sent them? They are like a lover's gift."

Josephine turned to Eugénie with startled eyes. "A lover's gift! Oh, Miss Fragonard!"

"Tut! Don't jump at me like that. My experienced intuition tells me a man sent them. Yes?"

"Yes."

"Then the man is your lover."

"No, no! Why, he's never thought of me in that way for a moment! He couldn't want me to—to——" Josephine could not speak the word. She went on, breathlessly: "He couldn't care for any girl—that way—or—want her—to care. It wouldn't be possible—because he's—he's——"

"Yes, my dear, I know Jan Novak is married," said Eugénie, calmly.

Josephine's color fled. How did Miss Fragonard know? For an instant dismay was in her face. Then, like a flame, the exaltation came back. She looked directly at Eugénie.

"Yes, he sent me the roses." Her voice was warm and vibrant. "And he sent me a ticket for the recital. I was right down in front. He says it's an inspiration to see me when he plays. Oh, it's wonderful to know that I can inspire such a great artist!"

Eugénie was silent as they passed a group of women. Then she said, with a short laugh:

"The sailor finds a love in every port—the artist, an inspiration."

Josephine shrank from her. A woman like Miss Fragonard would never understand. Oh, if she could only have walked home alone! Her wonderful afternoon was spoiled.

Eugénie slackened her pace. "Don't walk so fast, child. Have mercy on me and remember I danced till daylight."

Josephine fell into step but did not speak. Eugénie looked at her. Should she tell her that she was in a private

room at Mme. Fantin's when the hat was bought, and heard all? And that she knew of more than one meeting with Novak since? No, she wouldn't tell her, now. But this sort of thing mustn't go on. It would never have gone this far if the child had been living with Alice Sothern. But as she was living now she was practically unchaperoned. Too bad that Stanhope was away. A word from him would be worth a volume of advice from her. The girl was in love with Novak. That was as plain as daylight. But she didn't know it. And it was just as plain that Novak did know. He was playing the game with his eyes open, she blindfolded. The quicker she realized it the better.

"You wonder how I knew he sent the flowers?" she asked, in a casual tone.

"Yes," said Josephine, in a low voice.

"I knew before I met you this afternoon."

"Why, what do you mean? I've never told anyone about—our friendship! It's too sacred to me."

"Sacred! How delectable! But, my dear, if you want to keep this sacred friendship a secret, wear a mask hereafter, when you go to a Novak recital. I watched you this afternoon from a box near the stage. You interested me so much that I kept my glasses on you more than on Novak. I confess you took my breath away at first. Why should you tell all of New York that you are in love with the great Jan Novak?"

Josephine flared with resentment.

"How can you say such a thing? Novak is like a god to me!"

"Stuff!"

Josephine smiled, coldly.

"I can't expect you to understand."

"The thing I can't understand is how you can think you are an inspiration to him. Inspiration! Don't be a little

fool! He's hypnotizing you with that rot because he wants the pleasure of seeing you fall in love with him."

"Oh, don't talk to me any more!" Josephine spoke passionately. "I know you don't mean to hurt me. It's because you can't—— you just can't understand."

"I grant my experience with artists is limited," said Eugénie, sweetly. "I've never been an inspiration to any of those I have known, and I have known some pretty big ones in my day. But they one and all sought me because I was a woman. It's natural I should think that Novak is seeking you for the same reason. I confess, I always looked upon such seeking as a compliment. If they had told me they saw in me nothing but an inspiration for their work, I should have resented it. But every woman to her taste."

Josephine was silent. But a warm flush spread over her face.

"Of course you have been together a good deal. Such an understanding as was revealed this afternoon, doesn't come with one meeting. What does he talk about when he is with you?"

There was no reply.

"You force me to answer my own question," said Eugénie, lightly. "He talks to you about your hair, your eyes, your ivory skin, your delicate hand, your mouth like a half-blown rose. He may even have told you that you have a dainty foot. Yes, I am sure he has. I assure you, my dear, it is your naïve beauty that draws him to you. Does he ever talk to you about his art? About your music? He doesn't care a rap what you think of his art. Or about your music. He cares for just one thing. The girl. And he cares for her only as a passing source of pleasure. He gained an aesthetic enjoyment in playing on your emotions this afternoon. I was charmed by the comedy. But don't give him the upper hand so openly, my dear. I don't blame

you for being in love with him. He could win me with one of those glances. But I wouldn't let him know it. I'd never forget for a moment that the greatest artist is first of all a man. And men are all alike, child, when it comes to women. They must be kept guessing, if they would be kept the lover. Now I must leave you. But not before giving you my solemn promise that I will keep your secret from my friends, if you will promise to conceal it as faithfully. Don't, I beg of you, when you go to Novak's next recital, say to all the world; 'I love him'."

Josephine had grown white.

"How can you think such a thing of me?" she asked in a low, strained voice.

"Oh, my Lord!" exclaimed Eugénie, with a laugh. Her gloved fingers touched Josephine's cheek. "You're delicious! Good-by!"

CHAPTER XV

JAN Novak was breakfasting in his suite in the quiet hotel where he made his home when in New York. He ate leisurely, yet with good appetite. When finally he pushed his chair away from the table he turned to the waiter standing in the background.

"Vous me servez bien, André. Tout a été excellent."

"Merci, Monsieur," said the waiter with an obsequious bow. He lifted the table, and, deftly avoiding the grand piano, went out, noiselessly closing the door after him.

Novak lighted a cigarette and took the morning paper from the reading table at his side. He settled himself comfortably in his cushioned arm chair and glanced over the first page. The pallor of his face and the whiteness of his hands were emphasized by his black velvet robe, long and loose like a monk's cassock. His soft full hair shone golden against the deep-toned tapestry of the chair. Yet even now, in his relaxation, he looked the man of vitality and decision.

The first page occupied his attention but a few moments. He opened the paper and held it up to glance over the second and third pages. Again, little but politics. America was to elect a new president next year, and the papers must begin even now to extol their candidate and defame his opponent. He was not interested. He turned to the editorials. Still politics. On the opposite page he caught sight of his name. Ah! The criticism of yesterday's recital! He read it carefully. A very good criticism on the whole—still, somewhat too laudatory. It was true, he had never played better in New York, but no violinist could play quite so faultlessly as this. He would have liked some

mention of those moments of weakness in the Händel. If his criticisms were always like this, he might get what Brandt called a "prima donna." Then—the decline. But there was hope of progress so long as he kept the vision to criticize himself. He had attained a height. It would not be easy to remain there. It took as much work to hold a great position as to acquire it.

He was about to throw the paper aside when he saw his name again. This time he found a press agent story purporting to be an account of his daily life given by his valet.

He laughed, quietly. Ah! He had a valet! He must make his acquaintance! He was a Frenchman, it appeared, descended from a long line of valets that went back to the old *régime*! Novak, said this invented valet, would have only the best in everything, from the man who attended him to the violin with which he entranced his audiences. Novak was as tempestuous in his daily life as he was calm when before the public. He was never to be completely pleased, were it the omelette his personal chef prepared for breakfast, or the arrangement of his rare toilet articles on his dressing table. But it was nevertheless a divine employment to serve so great a master. With princely extravagance, he bought countless beautiful things that gave him but passing pleasure. He had only a day or two ago bought a jeweled dagger that had caught his eye as he passed an antique shop in Fifth Avenue——

Novak threw the paper to the floor.

Would American press agents never cease concocting their absurd fictions! Must he be written about in the papers as if he were an eccentric fool, in order to keep the public interested in his art? If the public must be fed with talk about his personal life, then let it be the facts. Let it be said he lived providently, that he might live comfortably when he retired from public life; that he kept for

his personal service only his English secretary, who had been with him since his first visit to London, fifteen years ago; that he was sufficiently reasonable as to his valet and chef to be satisfied with those he found in hotels; that he was not laboring as a public artist—for such a life was a labor—in order to squander his money on useless indulgences; that he was extravagant only in the accumulation of his library; that he was interested in many things other than his art. But it seemed the public must be told that Novak was a creature of brainless vagaries.— But why allow himself to be annoyed?

He took a book from the half dozen that lay on the table. If his fictitious valet had said he carried books with him wherever he went, then he would have said the truth. He could have gone so far as to say Novak was displeased if his books were not always where he could reach them. They must be near him when he breakfasted, when he dined, when he was restless at night. But that would not have been sufficient. The valet, to make Novak seem the artist to the public, would have invented imbecilities. He would have said that if the books were not always at hand Novak threw things, smashed things, tore his hair and shouted. It was well they were not mentioned. They were too much a part of himself to be degraded by publicity.

Novak opened the volume in his hand, and the annoyance was forgotten. When, after a time, there was a knock at the door, he made no response. The door was opened, and a small, thin, gray-haired man entered with the mail.

“Good morning, Mr. Novak.”

Novak looked up. “Good morning, Stafford. The mail is late.”

“I am sorry. It came at the usual time. But it grows heavier every day. This morning it was brought me in a large basket. Yes, I assure you. That is the result of your great recital yesterday afternoon. And almost all of

it from women, old as well as young. There were hundreds of gushing letters. They are all destroyed. I know your opinion of such frivolity."

"The word does not fit, Stafford. Frivolity is often charming, exquisite. But this erotic emotion! It is nauseating."

"Quite," assented the secretary. He laid the mail on the desk in two neat piles, business, and personal.

"I will attend to them later in the day," said Novak. "I am in an idle mood this morning."

"There are business letters that require immediate attention," replied the secretary, quietly. "Later in the day there will be much for me to do. You leave for the West tonight."

There was a fumbling at the door. The knob rattled.

"Again!" exclaimed Novak. He sprang from his chair and started for the door. The secretary hastened to intercept him. "Do not disturb yourself. I will see to it."

Novak pushed him aside and threw the door open. A huge bouquet was tied to the knob. Jerking it loose, he flung it down the hall. Then, closing the door with a slam, he turned to the secretary.

"It has been so every morning since I took this suite a week ago. And always the card, saying, 'I adore you.' It is unbearable. She must live in this hotel, to have such ready access to my door. You are to find who she is, and you are to go to her with this message from me." He stopped and deliberately lighted a cigarette. When he went on, it was with a disdainful smile, and in his most courtly tone. "You are to tell her that Novak is enamoured of women. But for a woman to deny him the privilege of preference, is to give him the privilege of repudiation."

The secretary, his face immobile, said he would attend to the matter. Novak dismissed the subject with a shrug,

and the comment: "I leave you to pursue your own course. But the annoyance is to cease."

He sat down at the desk and gave his attention to the mail. He took up the personal letters. He would select only those he felt inclined to read. The others could wait. When he saw the forceful handwriting on the third envelope, a deep light came to his eyes. He reached for the paper cutter, and opened the letter with a hand that was not quite steady.

It was written in French, and was dated from Paris. Novak read it slowly, as if to draw the fullest meaning from every word, and, having finished, turned back to the first page and re-read the whole. And still he did not put the letter aside. He sat with it in his hand, his eyes on the floor, an unwonted warmth softening his face.

Yes, he had spoken the truth when he said he was enamoured of women. To be with a charming woman or girl was a stimulus. Without this stimulus the flavor was gone from his life. He had drawn fleeting pleasures from many women—from this one because of her exquisite face, from that one because of her delicate perception of beauty in nature or art or books, from another because of her engaging lightness. From each woman that attracted him he drew what delight he desired. But these ephemeral experiences had no relation to love. The man who thought he loved many was the man who loved none. No man realized love until he found the woman who appealed to the all in him—the impelling desire, the heart, the brain. He had found such a woman. And all other women were to him as fragments of pleasure.

Novak looked long at the signature of the letter, as if it brought him into the visible presence of her who had written it. Then, slipping it into the envelope, he laid it on the desk.

He ran through the remaining personal letters. An ad-

dress written in a cramped hand, made him frown irritably. Why should he read her letter this morning? Why should he read it at all? It would be like all her letters, filled with complaints about the weather, her headaches, the neighbors. It would ask why did he keep on giving concerts when he had made enough to settle down at home and live like other men.—She had the bourgeois mind, the bourgeois interests. To look after the house, visit with relatives, gossip with neighbors, go to church, sit by the lamp in the evening, making endless embroideries, this was all she wanted from life.—If he had not gone to the theater that night in Warsaw, and seen her on the stage as a dainty, demure ingénue, he would never have married her. With the ingenuousness of a youth of eighteen, he had believed it was love that made him desire her. Now the slim, pretty, appealing girl of seventeen was a fat, plain, phlegmatic woman of forty-one.—It was well that she disliked to travel, that she clung to accustomed comforts and people. It was well that she had yielded to his determination to have their son educated in France. If it were not for the letters that came with such irritating regularity, his life would be as free as he desired.

Novak placed the letter with those to be opened later, and turned to his business mail, which he went through as carefully as if he were a man of affairs instead of an artist. On the back of each envelope he made notes of the answer he desired sent. As he finished the last letter, he turned to the secretary, who had been reading the paper.

"This," said he, tapping the sheet in his hand, "is good news."

The secretary approached. A glance at the heading recalled the contents. "Yes, it was a fortunate investment."

"I wish I had put in twice as much. It could have been done easily."

"But there was the risk."

"True, one must think of that when one engages in a financial experiment." Novak rose and went to the window.

"It is an exhilarating day. I shall go out. At what hour do I leave tonight?"

"At eleven-thirty."

"Where do I go?"

"First to Cleveland. Then to Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Chicago. Then Detroit and Buffalo, after which we return East—Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington. From Washington, you come back to New York."

"How long shall I be away?"

"Three weeks and four days. Then, after a week here, comes the long trip to the Pacific coast, with many engagements both going and returning."

"And you have all those in your head, too?"

"Yes. They, too, are all in my head."

Novak smiled somewhat wearily. "Do not inform me of them. It is sufficient to know they must be met when they come."

He went to the desk and took up the letter with the Paris postmark. As he passed into the bedroom he said; "I wish you to call up Brandt and inquire if he can go for a walk with me at twelve o'clock."

When, a few minutes later, the secretary reported that Brandt was to be busy until four, but would gladly go at that hour, Novak was annoyed.

"Tell him I cannot wait so long. I am restless. But I will call on him before I leave tonight. And Stafford, I will sign the letters at seven."

When Novak reentered the sitting room he was dressed for the day in a conservative dark suit. What should he do? It was not pleasant to spend so enchanting a day alone. There were many from whom to choose a companion, yet the choice was difficult. He was in the mood for a delicately stimulating pleasure. Ah! There was

the little Miss Prescott. He had forgotten her since yesterday. She had looked very lovely at the recital. It was well he had sent her the flowers. They had awakened her to the response he had been seeking. It was fascinating to quicken the emotions of so naïve a girl. Was not this the day she had a lesson? Yes, it was the day. He would meet her as she left Brandt's. And she should while away the hours for him.

As Novak turned into Forty-fifth Street, he saw Josephine coming down Brandt's steps. She looked in his direction, and he knew she recognized him. When she reached the sidewalk, she stood for an instant as if irresolute, then turned and walked rapidly away.

What did this mean? Until today she had always come to meet him frankly. Too frankly. But now she was trying to avoid him. Charming!

Quickening his pace, he soon overtook her. He lifted his hat and smiled.

"Good morning. You seem hurried."

She flushed and held her muff to her face.

"Yes, I—I—wanted to hurry home."

Novak laughed, softly. "You are hurrying in the wrong direction." He gently pulled the muff away. "Why did you seek to avoid me?"

Her color deepened.

"I—I wasn't trying to avoid you. I had an unhappy lesson. My first Brahms. Brandt was displeased. I was excited and—and—didn't know I was going away from home."

"Ah, indeed!"

"But it is true," she said, with lowered eyes. "Brandt was unkind because of the Brahms."

"But is it true you ran away from me because Brandt was unkind?"

She did not speak.

Novak's hand rested lightly for a moment on her arm. "You shall be punished for trying to run from me. I am going to the country for lunch. You shall go with me. I do not ask. I command."

"To the country for lunch with you! Oh, I should like it so much!" For the first time she met his eyes. She had never looked more lovely.

And he took her to the country club on Long Island to which he had a guest privilege. During the short trip in the train she said little. She was bewildered by her happiness. Hitherto she had been with him only when they walked together after a lesson. Now that he had chosen her for his guest, she could not grasp her delight. He told her she seemed to think she was a captive. Well, if so, he would prove to her that captivity had its charms.

But after they had reached the little station and were driving through the open country, she grew excited. She laughed and chatted. Novak watched her, a half-smile on his face. When she said she felt as if Aladdin had rubbed his lamp and whisked her into fairyland, he told her no prince in any fairy tale had ever found so bewitching a princess. When, looking up at him shyly, she spoke of the flowers he had sent, he said the roses were so like her he could not resist sending them. But when she began to speak of yesterday's recital, he interrupted. She must promise that for this one day music should not be mentioned. For music would recall the public to him. Today he wished to forget the public. It should be their day, alone.

Her face was rapturous as she gave the promise. For a moment her eyes were raised to his. Then she turned away her head.

She was sorry, and she was relieved, when they drew up before the long, low-roofed club house. Sorry because she felt that the most beautiful thing in the world would

be to drive alone with him all afternoon. Relieved—she knew not why.

Her shyness returned when they entered the spacious reception hall. Great logs were blazing in the wide brick fireplace. There were deep-cushioned chairs, divans luxurious with pillows, tall vases filled with flowers, and tables strewn with papers, magazines, and books.

People were here and there, sitting in groups, talking, or alone reading. They stared at Novak, even those who did not know that this was the great violinist who was the talk of New York. For Novak was a dominating figure in his long fur coat, his hat in his hand, his head held with characteristic dignity. There was a stir, and whispering. Women raised their lorgnettes. One said, in a low voice, "It's Novak!" Another, "What a striking face!"

But Novak might have been alone in the room for all the heed he gave the people or their stares and comments. He seemed to see only the attendant who approached and said, deferentially, in French, that he was at Monsieur Novak's service. Josephine, who had attracted her own share of attention, from the women because she was with Novak, from the men because of her beauty, had sunk into a chair, ill at ease in this strange atmosphere, so intimate, yet so cold. Novak, after giving his orders briefly, as one who knows exactly what he wants, came to her. A maid would conduct her to the dressing room. He would be here when she returned. The maid appeared and ushered her up the wide carpeted stairway. And she went as in a dream.

When she came down again, Novak was sitting before the fire, his back to the room. He rose and drew up another chair. How fresh and charming she looked after the drive, he said. Was she not famished? But wait! He had ordered a feast fit for the princess.

They lunched in a secluded corner of the restaurant, by a window that looked out upon the open country. What she ate, Josephine scarcely knew. She was conscious of little but the man who sat facing her, sometimes leaning back in his chair and looking at her through half-closed eyes; sometimes talking lightly; chiding her because she ate so little; asking her to look at him, that he might know if she was happy.

When she refused the wine, he reached across the table and, lifting the glass, held it out to her. She shook her head. She had never tasted wine. Ah! Perfect! She should take her first sip with him. It would be as a dedication of their day.

His eyes held her entranced as she took the glass. He lifted his own, and they drank to their day together.

The wine set her blood tingling, brought back the sparkle to her eyes, the laughter to her lips. She had been sweet, shy, tremulously happy. Now she was vivid, captivating. Novak lighted a cigarette, then held out the gold case to her with a smile. No? Then another time. For there would come another time.

There could never be another time as beautiful as this, was her answer. Ah! She was more easily satisfied than he. For to him, this was but the prelude.

After the luncheon, they went out into the woods. The air was still. A mist, sheer as gossamer, veiled the bare black trees, and made each vista seem a pathway into a magic world. Through a screen of branches, the sun was a disc of dull red in a gray sky. Novak said it was a scene as remote from life as a nun at prayers.

They wandered idly. At times they were silent. Again, Novak told charming tales from the folk lore of his country. And yet again, he seemed to think only of the young girl walking beside him, her face luminous. He called her *Najdroższa*, and she had no need to ask the meaning of

the name. He teased her, endearingly. And when he asked, did she not now believe that captivity had its charms? she could not answer. Nor when, bending down to her, he asked, was she pleased with her captor?

They were following a narrow path. Through the mist, the sunlight had become a pale gleam. The air grew colder. Suddenly they came out at the edge of a little stream. Novak drew off his gloves. She must not be chilled. He fastened the fur close about her throat. As his hands touched her face, a strange delicious sensation surged through her. She closed her eyes, her breath quickening. Slowly he drew her within his arms. He pressed her head against his shoulder and kissed her, full on the lips, with long warm kisses.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR days the one living reality in Josephine's life was Novak. Coherent thought was drowned in the awakened passion that surged through her at the remembrance of his kisses, his caresses. That it was a great man who had wooed her to this response, increased the turmoil that was at once a torture and a delight. To see him again, to be with him—she lived only for this. "I love him!" she said, with an ecstasy that carried her beyond the power to reason. And he loved her. He had not said it, but she knew. Oh, how well she knew!

He had told her there would be another time. But oh, it surely could not be more beautiful! Nothing could be more beautiful than those moments when they stood by the stream and he kissed her. Than their walk back, through the still woods, in the mist.

She took the roses she had pressed, and looked at them, not with reverence, as when she had put them away, but with impassioned rapture. Each sight of the hat he had chosen for her seemed to bring him near. Even the muff he had drawn away from her face so gently, set her heart throbbing.

Underneath it all, from the first, a thought threatened her happiness. But the force of her infatuation held it in abeyance. Then, as the days passed, it began to take definite form. She tried to beat it back. But, slowly, it asserted itself, until, at last, she could no longer deny it.

It was wrong to love this man, to let him love her. For he was married.

She fought it, passionately. She had a right to this love. It was the most beautiful thing that had ever come into

her life. A thing so beautiful could not be a sin. If he did not care for her, if he was as Miss Fragonard had said, then it would be wrong. For even if she loved a man, she could not let him kiss her, call her sweet names and caress her, unless she knew he loved her. Men were sometimes like that with girls, and didn't mean anything by it. They were only seeking their own pleasure, as Miss Fragonard had said Novak was doing with her. But oh! She knew that Novak was not like that! She knew he loved her. Not as much as she loved him; she could never expect that; for she was nobody and he was great. But that made her love all the more beautiful. It was the one thing in which she could be greater than he. She wanted to love him more than he loved her: for then she would be giving him more than she received. But, no, that could not be. Even a little of Novak's love was a far, far bigger thing than the whole of hers. For Novak was a great man.

His marriage was unhappy. She had heard people say so when they were gossiping about him. And if she could help to make him happy, wouldn't that be a wonderful thing for her to do? How could any love that brought happiness be wrong?

Oh, she knew this love was not wrong! She knew it so well she would be proud to tell the whole world that she loved him.

Tell Aunt Mary—Sam—Dr. Jewett? No, she couldn't think of them. She hadn't let herself think of them. They had nothing to do with this love, because they would never be able to understand it. They would think her bad because she loved a married man. They would never be able to see that because the man was Novak it made all the difference in the world. They would feel she had done something to make them ashamed of her. To make all Parksburg ashamed of her. But she didn't feel any

shame. Perhaps she ought to—she had always been taught that such things were wrong—she had believed they were wrong. And now she didn't feel that way. Why had she changed so completely? It was because, when she used to judge between what was right and what was wrong in love, she hadn't known anything about what love was. But now she knew! Never again would she think she had a right to judge whether anyone's love was right or wrong. And no one had a right to judge whether her love was right or wrong. No one but herself. . . And she knew it was not wrong. She was so sure, that she would give up everything to keep it.

Everything? Aunt Mary's love? If Aunt Mary knew, she could never love her again as she loved her now. For she couldn't understand. She would think her wicked. She wouldn't cast her off, but she wouldn't feel the same toward her. It would break Aunt Mary's heart. But Aunt Mary should never know. No one in Parksburg should know. She could keep Aunt Mary's love and the respect of all her friends at home, and have this beautiful love too. And she wouldn't be concealing anything from them because she was afraid, but only because she didn't want to hurt them. And—yes—because she didn't want them to hurt her: for it would hurt her terribly to know that they all thought she was doing a wicked thing.

Wicked? Oh, it hurt her even to use such a word in connection with this love.

She swept aside all her doubts, and gave herself completely to her happiness. And her happiness fused the routine of her life into a single aspiration. She worked at her music with heightened ardor, only that she might sometime please Novak by her progress. When she went to a concert, she tried to listen as she thought he would listen. She determined she would study French; for that

was the language he liked best to speak. She planned to read books she thought he would like her to read.

Meanwhile she waited, joyously expectant, for his first letter. She glowed at the mere thought of seeing her name written by his hand on the envelope. She knew it would be a wonderful letter. As wonderful as their day together.

But no word came from him.

The first week she found ready excuses for his silence. He was so busy. There was the long trip, and then, four recitals in six days. She had seen the dates in the paper. And then, too, so many people would be wanting to see him. He probably didn't have a minute to himself: and even if he did, he would be too tired to write. He knew she would understand. And she did. She knew that he was thinking of her, that he couldn't forget her no matter how busy he was or how many people he met. And when the letter did come, it would be all the more wonderful because he had waited to write until he could say everything he wanted to say.

The second week was a long suspense. Each arrival of the postman was awaited with breathless eagerness. Each disappointment met with a growing fear. But still she hoped, resolutely, desperately.

The third week she sank into despair. He did not love her. He did not even care for her at all: for if he cared ever so little he could not go away for weeks and send her no word. What Miss Fragonard had said was true, he was seeking her only for his own pleasure. All the time he had been kissing her and petting her and talking to her in that sweet way, he was only amusing himself. And now he had forgotten her. He had forgotten her while she had been thinking of him, longing for him, every hour since he had gone.

She had times of wild weeping and times of torpid

misery. How could he treat her so cruelly! How could he let her suffer like this! He knew she loved him. But he didn't care for her love. He had treated her like a plaything, and then had thrown her aside. Why couldn't she hate him as she would hate any other man who had done such a thing to her? But she couldn't hate him. She could only love him with her whole soul!

And then came a last excuse.

Great artists were so different from other people. They often had the queerest notions. She had read in a life of Chopin how he detested writing letters. He would walk all the way across Paris to answer a note in person rather than write it, although that wouldn't have taken him five minutes. Perhaps Novak detested writing letters. Perhaps he never wrote to anyone. She didn't see how he could help writing to anyone he really cared for. But he was a great artist, and he might—perhaps he might—be peculiar in that way.

The thought had come to her as she was preparing to go for a lesson. She clung to it with fierce tenacity as her one possible source of hope. As she left the apartment she heard the postman's whistle somewhere in the block; but she did not hurry down the stairs. When she opened the door to the street, he was coming up the steps. He had become so accustomed to having her meet him and ask for the mail that he quickly sorted it out and gave it to her. She took it indifferently, and, running through the envelopes, saw there was nothing for her but a letter from Sam and a picture postal from Stanhope. The rest was for Georgette. But she was not disappointed. All hope of a letter from Novak was gone. She could only hope that he never wrote letters. She slipped the mail into the box. Neither Sam's letter nor Stanhope's postal had any interest for her.

When she entered the studio, Brandt rose from his

desk. "Make ready for the lesson," said he. "I am but a moment. This letter for Novak, it must go immediately. He makes what you call a row if I write not to him comes every other day, like he writes to me." He went into the hall, calling: "Koubek! It is now ready. You put it in the box."

The room went black before Josephine's eyes. She sank into a chair. Then she heard Brandt's voice.

"Ach! You are ill!"

She steadied herself. "No, I'm not ill."

"But you have the paleness like the chalk. You make a scare for me. I think you faint." Brandt's voice was gentle, his manner concerned. "I get wine for you or have Koubek bring you hot coffee."

Josephine rose, pale, calm.

"You are very kind, Mr. Brandt, but I don't need anything. I'm like that, sometimes, when I'm tired."

"But perhaps it is better we not make the lesson today."

"I feel better able to take a lesson today than I have for two weeks," said Josephine, with a cold smile.

Brandt shrugged his shoulders. "I never know what to make of these women pupils. They are one way this minute, quite otherwise the next minute. Well, it makes me pleasure to know you are not ill. We now proceed to the lesson."

As she played, Josephine felt as if her fingers were detached from herself, moving of their own volition. She played accurately and with careful phrasing. And all the time she had but one thought—he had been writing to Brandt every other day.

When she had finished a Bach *Prelude* Brandt said: "Very good. You are obtaining the control of yourself. I have the encouragement about you."

The praise that so short a time ago would have filled her

with delight roused no response. . . . He had been writing to Brandt every other day.

She played a *Sarabande* and *Gigue*. Again Brandt was pleased. "You learn the repose. That comes a good sign."

There was a peremptory knock at the door; then it was flung open and Novak, in his long fur coat, entered.

"I interrupt!" he exclaimed in French. "But I do not apologize. I stopped off on my way to Philadelphia that I might lunch with you."

Brandt seized him by the shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks. "Mon fils! Mon fils!"

Novak threw back his head and laughed. He caught sight of Josephine. Ah! The little Miss Prescott! What a charming coincidence!

As he threw off his coat, he said in his clear-cut English: "I starve! Break the news to Koubek that she may prepare enough."

"Ach! You did not say to her that you remain for the lunch? Then I tell her. She make a feast for you!" exclaimed Brandt, and hurried from the room.

That instant Novak was at Josephine's side.

"Najdroższa!" And he kissed her on the mouth.

The cold whiteness of her face kindled to a flame of rapture.

Novak, bending over her, laughed softly. "I stopped off on my way to Philadelphia to see you," he said, and thought it was well she did not understand French. "At two, in the entrance to the Metropolitan Museum," he added quickly, as he heard Brandt's steps in the hall. And when Brandt entered the room, Novak was reclining in a chair by the fire.

"We make an end of the lesson now," said Brandt to Josephine.

Gathering up her music, she went out, quietly. Brandt

was so absorbed in Novak that he took no notice of her departure. But if he had looked at her, he would again have said that a woman is this way one minute, quite otherwise the next minute. And if Novak had looked at her, he would have seen the face that was upturned to him by the stream in the woods.

CHAPTER XVII

GEORGETTE, coming home late that afternoon, found Josephine, in the dusk of the living room, huddled comfortably in the big wicker chair.

"What are you sitting here in the dark for?" she asked. "Been taking a nap?"

"No, I was just lazy."

Georgette threw aside her coat and furs. "Where are the matches?" She fumbled on the table, found the box, struck a match, and lighted the lamp. "Might have offered to do it yourself," she grumbled. Then she laughed. "Feel as cross as a bear because I'm as hungry as one. You'll have to hurry if you're going for dinner with me."

"I don't feel like eating at one of those noisy restaurants tonight. I'm going to get something for myself here at home."

"Bah!" exclaimed Georgette. "I hate a picked-up dinner. And it isn't good for you to eat scraps. Bad for your art." She went over to Josephine. "Come on." Then, as she looked at her: "My word! What's happened? Fallen heir to a fortune?"

"Yes," said Josephine, with a low delicious laugh.

Georgette stared at her. "I believe it. After you've moped around here for two weeks in a way to try even my angelic patience, I suddenly find you looking as if you had a mortgage on all the happiness of the world. Why this miraculous transformation? Has Brandt been handing out some praise to you?"

"Yes."

"Which proves that I was right in my diagnosis of your dumps. Knew it must be that Brandt was hauling you over

the coals again, and so I kept still. Wasn't that good of me? Well, if praise from Brandt can work such a transformation, then praise be to Brandt. But I give you my word that when I saw you I thought you'd surely come into a million. Oh, and speaking of money," Georgette reached for her muff and drew some letters from it, "what do you think I've got for you?"

"A letter from Sam."

"How did you know?"

"I saw it when the postman came this morning. I put the mail in the box."

"And left it there all day?"

Josephine looked embarrassed. "I forgot all about it."

Georgette plumped down on the couch. "Just let me get my breath. And let me gaze reverently upon you. I'll never again have an opportunity to behold a girl who allows a letter from a millionaire lover to remain, for hours, forgotten and unread."

"Oh, do talk sensibly, Georgette."

"What can be more sensible than to talk about a millionaire lover? If I talked about one without dollars, I'd be talking without sense. Lord! What a pun! Well, dearie, although I'm on the verge of starvation, I can't go to dinner until you've read your letter. I long to hear the latest news about Sam. I have a tender feeling for him. So tender, I'm dying to hear how much money he made last week." She tossed the letter into Josephine's lap. "Be merciful and relieve my suspense."

"As if he ever mentioned how much money he's making! He's just the same Sam he was when he was in the store."

"Gracious! I do hope he isn't a model young man. Now, dearie, don't tell me he is. For then I'll have to give him up, the million included. I could never stand a model young man. What do you mean by letting the letter lie there in your lap? Aren't you going to read it now?"

Or are you afraid your emotion will be too great for an audience?"

"I'm perfectly willing to read every word out loud to you." Josephine tore open the envelope and took out the letter. Why, it wasn't a letter at all! Only a note! He was coming to New York! He was coming Thursday! He was going to stay for a week. Novak was coming back Thursday. He had said he would have a week with nothing to do but what he desired to do. He had said they—No, no! Sam mustn't come. She wouldn't have it. She'd stop him—some way.

"Heavens, child! Is he dead?" exclaimed Georgette. "No, he can't be announcing his own death. What on earth is the matter?"

Josephine slipped the letter back into the envelope. Her mouth was set, her eyes were cold. "All he says is that he's coming to New York on Thursday."

"Aha! I knew there was good news for me in that letter. Coming Thursday! Well, I give you full warning I shall make a dead set for him. What a stunning match it would be for me! A man of the people, rugged, honest, the soul of simplicity, and coining money by the hundred thousands. I shall leave no stone unturned to cut you out."

"If you can get him, you're welcome to him."

"Much obliged. Still, I'd appreciate your generosity more if you were offering me something you really wanted yourself. I'm anxious to see this young man you turn down so coolly. What's the reason? Has he a rival? Are you in love with someone else?"

A burning flush suffused Josephine's face. The hand that held the letter trembled.

Georgette looked at her with wide-open eyes and lifted brows, then laughed meaningly as Josephine shrank back in her chair, her eyes lowered. She leaned toward her.

"There now, dearie, never mind. I promise you I'll not

spread the news. But who would ever have believed it! My word! It takes these demure innocent-looking creatures to turn the trick behind one's back. I declare, you're a wonder. Anyone who can put it over on me has some skill. I have fallen low in my self-esteem. Good Lord! Who can it be? I know it isn't Stanhope. It can't be that ripper of a Hastings? There, you needn't speak. I know it isn't Hastings. Carlton? No, it isn't Carlton. Sorry, though. Goodness, child! You're not in love with old Brandt, are you? No, it isn't Brandt. Well now, dearie, don't look such fire and brimstone at me. I'll stop teasing you. But let me tell you one thing. If it's anyone I know, you'll be giving yourself away the first time I happen to mention his name. You haven't the emotional self-possession of a Novak, you know."

Josephine sat up and brushed the hair back from her forehead. Her cheeks still burned, but her eyes told nothing. "How glad I ought to be," she said, coolly. "I've always insisted that was his one fault."

Georgette threw up her hands. "Listen to the child! Revealing undreamed-of powers of repartee. That's what comes of having the daily privilege of my stimulating society. Well, I must perform the holy rite of powdering my piquant and charming face, and then, to dinner! And I need it. So many surprises, when I'm unfortified by food, have quite upset me. But I wouldn't have missed it if I'd paid the penalty of dining at home."

Georgette went to the mirror over the mantel, and set her hat at a more fetching tilt. She took out some long pins from her hair and jabbed them in again, in an attempt to gather up stray locks. Then she took a powder case from her bag and powdered her face recklessly. She turned from the mirror with a shrug.

"I look like a fright. But no matter!" She gathered up her letters. "I'll read them while I'm dining. Oh, here's

a postal for you, from Stanhope. I forgot all about it in my anxiety over Sam's letter." She handed it to Josephine. "I consider all postals, particularly postals from men, public property. I read it. He sailed from Liverpool on the twentieth, which means that your devoted admirer will be here in a few days."

"He's not my devoted admirer," protested Josephine. "Mr. Stanhope is like a brother to me."

"Heaven help you! It's got as far as the brother business, has it?" laughed Georgette, as she drew on her coat. "Now I'm off."

As the door closed, Josephine clenched the letter in her hand, her face resentful, determined.

Sam must not come. She wouldn't let him come. He had said it was a business trip, but he wouldn't have much to do. He hoped she would save the week for him. She knew what that meant. He mustn't come. He shouldn't come. It was to be the most beautiful week of her life. . . . He had said he would take her for her first sight of the sea. . . . Sam would spoil everything. She would write him to wait, that just now she was unusually busy with her music. But he wouldn't believe it. He'd know she was trying to put him off. She'd write him she hadn't been well; for him to wait until she felt strong enough to have a splendid time with him. But that wouldn't do. He'd take the first train to see what was the matter with her. And there wasn't really time to write a letter. And, anyway, she couldn't tell him to wait, when he said he had business to attend to. But he mustn't come. What right had he to come without asking her if it was convenient? She wouldn't let him come, if she had to do something that would break their friendship. She must have the week free. . . . He had said it would be a lyric intermezzo in his arduous winter. . . . Oh, why must Sam come? And he would come. She couldn't prevent

him. She didn't even want to see him! She wouldn't care if she never saw him! She wouldn't give up an hour with Novak for a thousand hours with Sam. Nor with anyone. Not even Aunt Mary. . . . He had stopped off in town, just to see her! The great Novak, who was playing in Philadelphia tonight. How he had rushed to her, when he saw her in the studio!

She drew a long breath and sank back in the chair. Sam's letter slipped from her hand to the floor.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOSEPHINE, on her way to the station early Thursday evening to meet Sam, was filled with the thought of Novak. He was back in New York. He was near to her. She was soon to see him.

She had accepted Sam's coming as inevitable, but she was passionately determined he should not interfere with her happiness. And she had made up her mind that she would stop at nothing to deceive him. He must not know about Novak. Even now, on her way to meet him, her happiness was momentarily chilled as she thought of what he would say if he knew. But she put the thought aside quickly. He should not know. He had no right to know.

As she entered the station, she was wishing it was Novak she was coming to meet instead of Sam. She resented that it was Sam.

Then she caught sight of him in the crowd coming through the gates from the train. She saw him draw apart and look searchingly about. A swift gladness submerged her resentment. Sam! She hurried to him.

He dropped his suitcase and bag, and seized both her hands.

"Josie!" He looked boundlessly happy.

"Yes, it's Josie." She laughed, and at the same time wanted to cry. How good it seemed to hear someone call her "Josie!"

His grip on her hands tightened. "I was looking all around for you. Thought you hadn't come. How could you expect me to know you with that contraption on your head? It's mighty becoming, Josie."

Her vivid blush set Sam's heart throbbing. Had she come at last to care what he thought of her appearance?

Josephine did not look at him as she said: "I rather like it myself." She laughed, lightly. "We can't stand here holding hands much longer."

Sam released her hands, slowly. "Guess that's so." He took up his bag and suitcase. "Let's go to the hotel."

"All right. Where are you going to stay?"

"The Waldorf."

"The Waldorf! Why, Sam Sterling!"

"What's the matter? Isn't the Waldorf good enough for me?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

"But it's awfully expensive."

Sam laughed aloud from sheer joy. She'd forgotten about his money. He was just Sam to her.

"That's where I'm going. My room's engaged. Wrote ahead for it."

"Well, of all things!" said Josephine, in an awed voice. Then she added, with an admiring glance at Sam's trim suit of indefinite mixture, and long loose overcoat, "Is that why you're so stylishly dressed?"

"No," he replied, with a smile, and a straight look into her eyes that made her turn away in confusion. But Sam did not seem at all confused. His tone was quite matter-of-fact, as he said: "Guess we'd better start. Where can I get a cab?"

And as they drove to the Waldorf, it was Sam who was at ease, not Josephine. She asked him about Aunt Mary, and Parksburg, and the gusher, but she was constantly thinking: "If he only wouldn't look so dominating and so happy!" Aunt Mary, he assured her, was as fit as a fiddle, and the spryest person in Parksburg these days. As for Parksburg, well, she knew all about how the boom was flattening out. He'd told her in his letters. The gusher was steadily going down. Might last another month

and might be a dead one before he got back. But it had kept going longer than most gushers, so he didn't have anything to complain of. And Josephine, knowing that Sam had made his million, said he certainly didn't. But that was all she said. She could not tell him with the freeheartedness of last summer that she was glad for him. Her resentment of his coming was rising again.

As they turned into Fifth Avenue, almost deserted now by vehicles and pedestrians, for it was after seven o'clock, she felt his eyes intent upon her. After a moment he said, "It's good to see you again, Josie."

She looked up at him and smiled, but her eyes were dull. "It's good to see you, Sam."

He smiled back at her and said he hoped they could have a good time together while he was there. But she must see to it that he started in slow—he wasn't used to the fast pace of New York. Might get out of breath the first day, if there wasn't someone to hold him back.

And in every look he gave her, every inflection of his voice, Josephine felt a new confidence and determination. By the time the short drive had ended, she knew, as well as if he had told her, that he had come to New York to ask her to marry him and that he would leave nothing undone to win her.

She was silent and abstracted as they entered the hotel. Sam hesitated, embarrassed in this unaccustomed atmosphere of brilliant luxury. Then he pulled himself together. "You wait a minute," said he to the boy in buttons who hovered near with suitcase and bag. He turned to Josephine. "I'll have to go and register, but I don't want to leave you alone among all these strangers."

"I'll wait in here." She stepped into a reception room and sat down in an armchair. Sam looked around the quiet room, guarded by a maid. "Well, this will do. I won't be gone but a minute."

When he came back he seemed quite at ease. "Say, Josie, this hotel is all right. That fellow at the desk said my room was ready and he hoped I'd like it. I'll have to get slicked up a little. Then we'll have something to eat. That stuff I got on the train today wasn't much to my notion. We'll see what they can set out for us here."

"All right. You needn't hurry."

Sam, looking down at her, could see nothing of her face under the drooping brim of the white hat, but her red mouth and rounded chin. He stood for a moment, silent; then he walked quickly from the room.

Josephine drew a breath of relief. He was gone. She would have time to think. . . . How was she going to manage him? He was so different. So determined. How was she going to put him off when she wanted to be with Novak? He'd be nice about not interfering with her work; he'd be put off for that and not say a word. But he wouldn't be put off if he thought it was because of someone else. She knew it. She could feel it every minute she was with him. But she would put him off, no matter what he said or did. It was going to be so much harder than she'd thought. And it would spoil her beautiful week to have to fight Sam all the time. Oh, it was horrid of him to come the very day of Novak's return. What was Novak doing now? Was he thinking of her? Of the beautiful times they were to have together? Of the day by the sea? How happy she would be if she were sitting here waiting for Novak! She wished she could slip away while Sam was upstairs, and not see him again tonight. She wished she never had to see him again! He seemed to think she was just the same Josie he'd always known. What would he think of her if he knew all? No, no, he must never find out that she loved a man who was married. He'd never believe in her again. He mustn't know, even if she had to lie to deceive him. And it wouldn't be wrong.

to lie to him. She'd only be protecting her beautiful love from his anger, and she'd be keeping him happy by not letting him know. Why did she feel afraid of him? For she was afraid. It must be because he'd grown so masterful. He never used to be that way with her. It frightened her. . . . She must be careful. If she wasn't just like herself with him, and nice to him all the time, he might suspect there was someone else. And if he suspected that, he'd never rest until he found out who it was. Georgette had said so this morning at breakfast, when she was teasing her and trying to find out who it was. She'd said if Sam had the least inkling he had a rival, he'd stay in New York until he discovered him. And Georgette had said: "He'll run him down. It takes a lover to catch a lover." . . . She must be careful every minute. But she could keep him from knowing. She'd been able to keep Georgette from finding out, although Georgette hadn't given her any peace since she knew there was someone she cared for. If her friends in New York knew who it was, then Sam would be sure to find out. But no one knew except Miss Fragonard. And even Miss Fragonard didn't really know anything except that Novak was her friend. Probably she hadn't meant half she said that afternoon after the recital. She was always making so much out of nothing, just to say clever things. She may have forgotten all about it by the next day. And, anyway, she'd promised not to tell. She'd kept her promise, too, for if she had wanted to tell anyone, it would have been Georgette. . . . There was no way for Sam to find out, unless she did something to make him suspect. But she wouldn't do anything like that. She'd be careful every minute. She'd be just as she'd always been with him.

When Sam came back, Josephine was walking about the room. Her color was high, her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"Hope you didn't get tired waiting, Josie."

"You weren't gone very long. Did they give you a nice room?"

"Well, I should say. Pretty nearly bowled me over when I first saw it. Enough fixings in the bathroom for a beauty parlor."

Josephine was thinking: "Sam actually looks handsome tonight. And how tall and strong he is." Aloud she said: "How well you look. And that suit is so stylish."

Sam reddened with pleasure. "Glad you like it, Josie. And now let's get something to eat."

It was because Sam possessed the dignity that comes from absolute lack of pretense that he was able to keep himself in hand when he entered the Waldorf restaurant with Josephine, and was greeted by an august headwaiter. Inwardly he felt rather sheepish at the thought that he was wearing business clothes, while this man, who placed himself at his service, was wearing evening dress. He wished he'd put on that swallow-tail the Toledo tailor had insisted on making for him. Perhaps it would have pleased Josie. This was in his mind even while he was telling the waiter that he wanted a table for two. But by the time they had reached the table, he felt better about the business suit. Some other fellows were wearing them. Showed they had good sense.

The waiter helped Josephine take off her coat, and then arranged it carefully over the back of her chair. Sam wondered if he ought to have done that. The waiter placed a menu before him. Sam looked at it, closely, then leaned across the table and said, with a twinkle in his eye:

"Say, Josie, you pick out what we'll have. I don't know these fancy names on this bill of fare. Do any of them spell plain ham and eggs? That's what I'd like. What do you say?"

"Oh, let's not have ham and eggs, Sam. Let's have something real different, now you're in New York."

"All right," agreed Sam. He leaned back in his chair and looked at her as if the sight was all the feast he wanted. The waiter slipped to Josephine's side. What would madame have? Oysters, perhaps? And would she permit him to call her attention to the Ragout à la Du-Barry? It was specially fine. And there was a Salade De Reszke. The great Jean De Reszke had himself given the recipe to Oscar. If she tried it she would never regret the choice.

Josephine, somewhat aflutter over the importance of ordering dinner at the Waldorf with the assistance of so attentive a waiter, readily seconded his suggestions, with the exception of the ragout. She felt that Sam would like beefsteak and baked potatoes, if he couldn't have ham and eggs. But she didn't want beefsteak and baked potatoes. She seized on chicken as a compromise. Sam liked chicken. "We'll have oyster cocktails first," she said. Sam leaned forward as if to speak, then settled back in his chair. Josie ordering a cocktail! Well, he'd wait. But if she started to drink it——!

"Guess you've been here before," he said, when the waiter had gone. "You seem sort of at home."

"Yes, I've been here twice, with Mr. Stanhope."

"Oh, you have? Well, I'm glad he shows you a good time. Suppose you go around with him a good deal, don't you?"

"Oh, no. He's been in Europe for months. And even when he's here, I don't see much of him. I don't see much of anybody but Brandt and old Tomek, my harmony teacher. You've no idea how busy I am, Sam. But you'll find out, now you're here."

"I'm glad to hear you're busy. Shows you're doing what you came here to do."

Josephine traced a pattern on the tablecloth with a fork. "But you mustn't expect me to go about very much with you. I have to be very careful and not get tired, for if I do it effects my playing, and that makes Brandt angry. He simply won't keep a pupil who lets pleasure interfere with practicing."

"I didn't come to New York to see the sights," said Sam, composedly. "I have a little business to attend to. The rest of the time I'd like to spend having a quiet visit with you, when you're not too busy."

Josephine, still intent on her pattern, said that would be nice. Sam felt the lack of warmth in her voice. Well, he was glad Josie wasn't the kind of girl who could be won easily. And a man who couldn't stand being held off wasn't much of a man.

The waiter brought the oyster cocktails. Sam looked at the plate with its circle of oysters on the halfshell, a glass in the center filled with a thick reddish mixture, and all reposing on chopped ice embellished with green leaves. "What do you call this?" he asked.

Josephine forgot her vexation. She laughed, gaily. "That's your cocktail, Sam. I knew what you were thinking about when you heard me order oyster cocktails. You can't fool me. I can read you like a book."

"Humph, you can, can you? I'm glad to hear it," said Sam, heartily. "Say, Josie, you'll have to show me how to eat this layout. Do you expect me to drink that stuff in the glass?"

She showed him how to eat the "layout," and they laughed and chatted, quite as in the Parksburg days.

"Well, that's what I call a fine way to serve oysters," said Sam, as he finished his cocktail. "But I did think for sure, Josie, that you'd ordered the real thing. Ought to have known better, though. Suppose I got the idea in my head from seeing so many of these women around here

drinking." He glanced at a near-by table. "I don't see how nice women can go into a public restaurant in clothes that make them look as if they weren't decent. I suppose they're nice women or they wouldn't be here. But I think it's scandalous. And the whole four of them are drinking just like the men."

Josephine looked at the dinner party and saw nothing to be shocked about. Then she remembered that she had felt much as Sam did, when she first came to New York. But she'd grown since then.

"I can't see how any woman can drink wine in a restaurant," said Sam, earnestly. "It's just vulgar to my mind. I suppose living in New York makes even the best of women get sort of free and easy. Now there's a girl no older than you, over there at the left, drinking wine with a fellow. You wouldn't ever drink wine in a restaurant with any man, would you, Josie?"

She kept her eyes on her plate as she said, "What a foolish question to ask me."

"It was a foolish question. You couldn't do such a thing. You're too fine. Well, this restaurant is all right, and it's nice to see this sort of place once in a while and get a line on how they do things in New York, but I wouldn't want to eat here every night. Give me a nice cozy dining room in a home, and a good plain meal. And that's what you like best, too, isn't it, Josie?"

She did not answer. She had not been listening. She was thinking of another table, in another restaurant, with another man sitting opposite her. A great and wonderful man, holding out a glass of wine, and saying she must drink with him to their day. A warm thrill set her a-quiver. She smiled, dreamily.

"You look mighty happy over something," said Sam, with a suggestion of perplexity in his voice. "Don't believe you heard a word I said."

Josephine came to herself with a start. She looked away from him. "I—I was thinking of Aunt Mary. Seeing you made me—think of her."

Sam leaned toward her. "Josie, I sometimes wonder if you know how much she thinks of you. She said I must take a day off when I get back and tell her everything about you. Your friends and what you're doing and all that."

"I don't do anything but work at my music."

"Well, I guess it won't take a whole day to tell her that." Sam gave his attention to the chicken. He wanted to say it was cooked too fancy to suit him, but refrained. Josie had ordered it. She still thought of nothing but her music, he said to himself, as he carefully pushed the chicken away from the white sauce, one taste of which had more than satisfied him. Well, if she married him, she could take all the lessons she wanted to take, and have a grand piano in every room in the house. She seemed more set on her music now than she did last summer. That was natural, seeing she was at her lessons again, and living where she heard people talking about artists and all that sort of thing. It wouldn't be easy for any fellow to get her to give up her career, but he'd never stop trying. She was the only girl in the world for him.

"What's the matter?" asked Josephine. "You look cross. Don't you like the chicken?"

Sam took a mouthful, white sauce included. "It's fine. Never ate better."

"I can hardly wait until the salad comes. It's a new kind. Jean De Reszke gave them the recipe, so it's named after him. The waiter told me."

"John who?" asked Sam.

Josephine laughed. "John, indeed! I said Jean De Reszke. He's a singer, a great artist."

"Suppose he gives concerts in the evening and goes about peddling salad recipes in the daytime."

CHAPTER XIX

As she was brushing her hair before the mirror the following afternoon, Josephine was startled by a sharp ring of the doorbell. It must be Sam arriving early, she thought. It would be just like him to come early if he wanted to, that is, it would be like the Sam of last night. She wouldn't answer the bell. He could go away and come back at four.

There was a second ring, long and determined. She stood, hesitating, the brush in one hand, a coil of hair in the other. Suddenly a second thought set her aglow. Perhaps it was some word from Novak, a special delivery letter or flowers, or something else to let her know he hadn't forgotten. . . . She slipped on a kimono and ran to the tube.

"Who is it?" she asked, eagerly. Then in a cool voice; "Oh, all right. Come up."

Miss Fragonard! What was she calling for when she knew that Georgette was never at home on Friday and that Grace was out of town? Was she coming about Novak? Did she know? Well, she would tell her it wasn't true. She would tell her to stop meddling in her affairs. What right had Miss Fragonard to dictate to her?

There was a knock at the door. Josephine opened it reluctantly. Eugénie, in a trailing black gown, half covered by a mauve cloak, with her red hair gleaming through a large black lace hat from which hung a flowing veil, pushed past her and sank on the couch.

"Heavens! I'm a wreck! Why did you keep me waiting so long, child? Oh, you were dressing."

Josephine, seeing that Eugénie was pale beneath her rouge, asked anxiously, "What's the matter?"

"I've just escaped death. I was in a cab on my way to the Art Club and there was a collision. A wheel off, broken glass, the horse on the pavement and I on the floor of the cab. Frightful! I thought that all my bones were broken until I finally got out and found I could stand up. It happened almost in front of your door. Didn't you hear the crash? My name was duly recorded by a policeman as that of the injured party and then I fled to you for refuge."

Josephine was all sympathy. "How dreadful! Are you sure you're not hurt?"

"Only my nerves, dear child. I feel as if I might faint. If I but had a cocktail!"

"I can give you one. You see, Georgette——" Josephine stopped, embarrassed.

Eugénie brightened. "Don't blush for Georgette, who never blushes for herself. Bring it along, child. I know it will be a rotten bottled mixture. But better than nothing."

"Bah!" said she, after drinking it. "Cheap Bronx. But it will settle my nerves. No, don't take the bottle away. I may want another before I go. I should be at the Art Club now, where I'm one of the hostesses at a tea. Afterward a dinner at Sherry's." She threw open her cloak and drew it off without rising.

"Oh!" said Josephine.

"Oh, what, my dear?"

"Nothing."

"Which is equivalent to saying you think my gown is too low. You would prefer shoulder straps, I suppose. But I never forget that my shoulders and arms are my one beauty. They've the whiteness that goes with red hair, and the lines are perfect. God keep me from getting plump,

is my daily prayer, to which the Amen is massage. Now don't bother any more about me. I shall sit here until I recover my breath. Then I'll order another cab. Finish your dressing. But what a pity that you can't always go about in a pink kimono, with your hair falling around you. You're an exquisite creature in déshabillé. Such a divine form! Such a faultless skin!"

Josephine, blushing, drew the kimono about her. "Yes, I must dress. I'm expecting someone at four. But don't hurry. Stay until you feel all right again."

"But it's four now. Ah, there's the bell!"

"Oh, you'll have to let him in!"

Eugénie became alert. "So it's a man!" The thought of Novak flashed into her mind. But, no, he wouldn't be such a fool as to come here.

Josephine was calling down the tube, "Yes, come up, Sam."

"Our Parksburg friend!" exclaimed Eugénie. "Georgette told me he was coming, but I didn't know he had arrived. Now, child, go and dress. I shall be delighted to entertain him while he waits."

Josephine was seized with panic. Sam coming to see her for the first time in New York, and being received by Miss Fragonard—and in that dress! He would be terribly shocked. But she couldn't see him in a kimono and with her hair down her back.

She fled without a word, and stood on the threshold of her room, listening. How long he was coming up. Probably he couldn't find the right apartment. Then she heard him knock, and the next moment Eugénie's voice:

"This is Mr. Sterling? But I need not ask, for I would know you anywhere from the picture of you Miss Prescott has shown me so often." . . . Josephine gasped. Eugénie Fragonard had never seen Sam's picture! . . . "And I," went on Eugénie, "am Miss Fragonard, a devoted

friend of Josephine's. It's entirely my fault that she is not ready to receive you. I had an accident and sought her protection. This detained her. Ah, your hat and coat. Here on this rack. I'm charmed to be the first of Josephine's friends to welcome you. Do be seated. No, this easy chair—not that flimsy thing—this is a man's chair. Josephine will be here in a moment. She was almost in tears when she found you had arrived and she not ready.” . . . Josephine gasped again. What lies! . . . Then Eugénie's voice; “When did you leave Parksburg?”

Sam's voice was but an indistinct murmur to Josephine. She stepped within her room. That horrid Eugénie Fragonard! She closed the door with a slam. She wanted her to know she'd been listening. Oh, there was the cocktail bottle! Sam would be horrified. And it would seem all the worse after her joke last night about the oyster cocktail.

She dressed hurriedly. Sam would be so embarrassed and bored while alone with Miss Fragonard.

She heard Eugénie's laugh, then Sam's deep one. That was strange. Then she heard Sam talking. How long he talked! Now Miss Fragonard was talking. How they were both laughing! Probably Miss Fragonard had been telling Sam some more lies. But it certainly was queer the way they were getting on together.

When Josephine entered the room, Sam was sitting comfortably back in an easy chair, listening to Eugénie's account of her one experience as an investor in a gold mine. “Of course, a business man like yourself would have known the whole thing was a fake. But I, alas, am a mere child when it comes to business. There is nothing I admire more than a man who can hold his own in the business world. Ah! Here comes Josephine. My dear, I know Mr. Sterling has been bored while waiting for you, but I've had a most interesting time.”

Sam was on his feet, his hand extended to Josephine.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting, Sam," she said. At the same time she realized there was no sign of the cocktail bottle and that Eugénie had her cloak about her shoulders.

"Yes, I'm sure he was bored," insisted Eugénie.

"Not a bit of it," said Sam, looking directly at her. "I have enjoyed meeting you."

"These men! All flatterers!"

Sam looked selfconscious and pleased. "I wasn't trying to flatter you. I mean it. I don't ever flatter anyone. Do I, Josie?"

Eugénie gave Josephine no chance for reply. "Mr. Sterling, if you really weren't bored, you will do me a favor, I know. Please call a cab for me. There's the Grant Hotel, right around the corner. Call them, and they will send one. Now, Josephine, while Mr. Sterling is telephoning, I'll try to make myself presentable." Whereupon Eugénie made her way to Josephine's room.

Josephine admired the way in which Sam executed his commission. He even gave the name of the apartment, the street and number, as if he had known the place for years. "It's for Miss Prescott," he added.

"But Sam, the cab isn't for me."

Sam made a gesture with his free hand, which meant, "I know what I'm about."

"Send it immediately. The lady's in a hurry. Very important."

"But why did you order it in my name, Sam?"

"Because, if the fellow tried to find the name Fragonard on those cards down there, he'd think he'd come to the wrong place."

Josephine was impressed. Sam was so capable. And how handsome he looked today. If he only wouldn't be so dominating. How was she going to manage? She

wouldn't let him make any plans until she heard from Novak. Perhaps Novak would meet her after her lesson tomorrow. And it would be just like Sam to say he would come and meet her and take her to lunch. . . .

She saw that Sam was looking at her intently. She began to talk at random. What had he been doing today? Didn't he think New York was perfectly glorious? Wasn't Fifth Avenue simply thrilling at this time in the afternoon? Didn't he enjoy staying at that beautiful hotel?

"Josephine, do come and help me a minute," called Eugénie. Josephine, glad of the excuse to escape being alone with Sam, hastened to answer the summons.

"What can I do?" she asked, as she saw Eugénie standing in the middle of the room, her coat buttoned to her chin, her veil carefully adjusted, her hands in her muff.

"Nothing, child. I just wanted to tell you that, in my opinion, there's a man with brains. And stunning looking. The cocktail bottle is behind the couch."

"Oh, I'm so glad that you hid it, and that you put on your cloak."

"Further proof that I have your interest at heart. If I'd been playing my own game, nothing would have pleased me better than to have left things as they were."

Eugénie swept regally from the room. Josephine followed at a safe distance behind the long train.

As they entered the living room, the bell rang, and Sam, looking out the window, said, "Here's the cab."

"Such surprising promptness!" exclaimed Eugénie. "I have you to thank for that, Mr. Sterling. And now I'm going to ask you to escort me to the cab. I haven't the courage to walk down those stairs alone, for I'm still nervous. And you must caution the cabman to drive very carefully. If I told him, he would pay no heed. But if you give the order he will not dare to disobey. Good-by,

dear Josephine, you've been charming, as always. Really, I ought to hate you for standing there looking like a rose and making me by contrast——” Eugénie waved a white-gloved hand, as though words failed her. “But I'm unwomanly enough to love you.” She kissed her delicately on the cheek, then turned to Sam. “Your arm, please. I shall feel more confident.” As she laid her hand on his arm, she looked up at him. “I didn't realize you were so much taller than I. Josephine, I'll send Mr. Sterling back in three minutes. But this is a sacrifice on my part. I should like nothing better than to carry him off with me to the tea. But I shall give a chafing dish party in his honor. Let us say Sunday evening. Consider my invitation a command, quite as if I were an Empress Eugénie instead of plain Eugénie Fragonard. Good-by, dear child.” And Eugénie disappeared down the hall with Sam.

Josephine laughed. Who would ever have believed it? Sam didn't see through Miss Fragonard at all, and swallowed every bit of that flattery whole.

Sam came back somewhat breathless from running up the stairs three steps at a time.

“Well, I got her off all right. And the driver promised he'd go slow.” Then he seemed to forget all about Eugénie. He came close to Josephine. Something in his manner made her draw back with an almost imperceptible shrinking. Sam put his hands in his pockets and looked down at her. “I believe you've grown since you left home last fall, Josie. You look taller—and different.”

She was not deceived by his attempt to seem unconcerned. She laughed, nervously. “That's just your imagination.”

“You've always told me I didn't have any imagination.”

She moved away to the table and straightened the books. “Georgette is so untidy. I had these all in order this morning.”

Sam began to walk about the room, his hands still in his pockets.

"So this is where you live. I've often wondered what it was like. Must seem queer to have everything on one floor. I'd feel all caged up. You don't ever stay here alone, do you?"

"Oh, no. Georgette is always here. But Grace,—she's the violinist, you know—is away most of the time. Miss Fragonard is a great friend of Georgette's, although she's a good deal older."

"Thought she seemed a pretty good friend of yours, the way she talked about you when I was taking her to the cab. She's a regular New York swell, I expect."

"Eugénie Fragonard? Goodness, no. She earns her living writing."

"She does? Well, that gets me. She must be pretty smart to support herself in such style."

"She's a very clever woman. You liked her, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I was mighty surprised when she opened the door. Thought I'd hit the Vanderbilt's by mistake."

Josephine laughed. She was beginning to feel at ease again. "You're so funny, Sam. You must have made a big impression on her, for she never makes a fuss over the men. Now I'm going to show you the apartment. And then I want you to take me for a walk."

"I'd just as soon visit here."

"But it's such a lovely day. And I haven't been out at all. I've been practicing and working on my harmony. I ought to have some fresh air."

"Then we'll go." Sam spoke as if his only desire was to do what she desired.

As she took him over the apartment, Josephine talked excitedly, scarcely giving him an opportunity to get in a word. Last night she had hoped he would say all he had

to say, and then it would be over. But, today, alone with him, her one wish was that he would say nothing he would not say to any girl.

When they came back to the living room, Sam went over to the piano. "I suppose this is where you spend most of your time."

"Only four hours a day. Brandt won't let me do more than that. But the way I've learned to practice since I came here makes four hours worth ten compared with the way I used to practice. Oh, Sam, it's wonderful to be with big people!"

She was sorry when she saw the hurt look that came to his face. "I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed the beautiful edition of Beethoven sonatas," she said, gently.

"I'm glad to hear that, Josie. You'd better get your things on if we're going out. It's almost dark now."

Josephine said it wouldn't take a minute, and went to her room. As she was pinning on her hat, she heard the telephone ring. But she waited to answer it until she had put on her coat and found her gloves. It was for Georgette, of course. Or someone wanting to find out Grace's address. Oh, Sam was answering it!

He held out the receiver to her as she came into the room. "Some fellow wants to speak to you."

"Someone wants Grace's address, I suppose," she said, as she took it. "Hello, this is Miss Prescott."

The words were scarcely uttered before she flushed, vividly; her mouth curved to a delicious softness.

"O—h! . . . Yes . . . Yes. I'm so glad . . . Tomorrow! That will be wonderful! . . . Yes, I have a lesson . . . I will be ready . . . Oh, I couldn't forget . . . Good-by." The voice, caressing from the first, had become little more than a whisper.

She hung up the receiver. "I—I've forgotten my hand-

kerchief. Wait a minute." And she went back to her room.

When she returned the handkerchief was in her hand. Sam had not moved.

"Get your coat on, Sam. I'm ready."

Still Sam did not move.

She walked to the door. "Sam, please hurry."

"Josie." Sam's tone was at once an appeal and a command.

She stood with her back to him. Her hand tightened on the doorknob.

"Well?"

He came to her and drew her gently away from the door.

"How strange you act," she faltered.

"Yes, I expect I do act strange, Josie," said he, in a low, resolute voice. "I'm going to say something to you I didn't intend to say today. But I must say it. . . . I came to New York to ask you to marry me. I've loved you for years. I've known you didn't love me. But I've thought lately that perhaps I could make you love me. Not as I love you, but enough—to marry me. If there's anyone else"—he stopped—"If there's anyone else you want to marry, I have no right to interfere. But I must know."

She stood with her head bent, breathing quickly. Then, slowly, she looked up at him.

"I can't marry you, Sam. But there is no one else I want to marry."

"Do you mean you don't want to marry on account of your music?"

"No, I don't mean that."

"Josie—is there any other man—who is trying to win you for his wife?"

"You have no right to ask me that, Sam."

about it. That girl wasn't the right kind of a friend for Josie. She might be putting her up to these new ways of keeping things in the dark. How happy Josie had seemed last night. What had happened yesterday? Where had he taken her? Was he in love with Josie? Or was he just leading her on? Josie had said she didn't want to marry him. But she would say that of any fellow who hadn't asked her, no matter how much she loved him. Perhaps he'd asked her yesterday, and that was why she was so happy last night. He'd never seen her happy in just that way before, so soft and gentle. But he'd known every minute that it wasn't because of him. All the time they were talking she seemed to be thinking of somebody else. Once or twice she'd acted as if she was afraid he was going to ask her what she'd been doing. Well, she didn't know him if she thought he'd do that. But he'd find out who that fellow was.

"Damn him!" said Sam, aloud, banging the bureau with his fist. "I'll find out who he is if I have to stay in New York all winter."

He'd never give Josie up until she was married to someone else. She'd said she couldn't marry him. That he mustn't ever speak to her about it again. Well, he guessed girls always said something like that when they weren't sure of themselves. He needn't expect that Josie was going to take him the first time he asked her. And he hadn't gone about it in the right way, anyhow. She knew it was that telephone call that had made him speak so suddenly. No wonder she'd turned him down. The next time he'd go about it in a different way. He'd be on his guard to-night. If she thought he was jealous of that other fellow there was no telling what she'd do. He guessed he could hold himself in hand for one evening, seeing he'd been doing it for years. But he'd have his eye out for that other fellow. And if he was there, you bet he'd spot him. That

was what he was going for, and to please Josie. These Sunday night parties weren't to his notion. Seemed sort of heathenish. And they weren't supposed to get there until after nine o'clock. Josie seemed to think that was all right. He wished she hadn't been so ready to take up with these New York ways. This town wasn't any place for a girl like her.

Sam took his dress coat from a hanger in the closet and eyed it dubiously. He would feel like a fool with that thing on. But Josie had said he must wear it. And she'd said she knew it would be becoming.

He put it on before the long mirror in the door, pulled down his cuffs, straightened his tie, and then turned to get a back view. When he faced the mirror again he looked rather pleased with himself. But his one thought was, he hoped Josie would like it.

She did not leave him long in doubt when he called at the apartment. He must take off his overcoat and let her see the new suit. So he took off the overcoat, and Josephine exclaimed: "There! Didn't I tell you that you would look stunning in evening dress?"

Sam would have been more impressed by the compliment if he had not been so upset at his first sight of Josephine in a low-necked, sleeveless gown. He felt an overpowering desire to seize her in his arms, the while he was shocked that she was willing to go out among people dressed like this.

"And what do you think of my gown?" she asked. "Isn't it a lovely shade of blue? It's one of Miss Sothern's. She gave it to me when she went away, and Aunt Mary altered it last summer."

"Did your Aunt Mary like it?"

"She thought it was beautiful. She was sorry I couldn't wear it in Parksburg."

"Humph!" said Sam. Well, if her Aunt Mary could

stand it, there wasn't any reason why he should object.

"And Miss Sothern gave me this, too." Josephine handed Sam the long white cloak she had worn the night she heard *Tristan*.

"It's a beauty, Josie," said he, running his hand over the soft corded silk. "My, but you're getting to be a swell!" He held it out for her. As he drew it close about her shoulders, the nearness of her set his pulse throbbing. He turned away, quickly. "It's time we started," he said, brusquely.

Josephine chatted excitedly as they drove up Broadway to Seventy-second Street, but Sam said little.

She was happy because she expected to see that fellow to-night. Well, he hoped he'd be there. He'd be glad of the chance to size him up.

But when they entered Eugénie's living room, with its subdued lights, its warm tones of brown and dull gold and green, and with a dozen or more guests scattered about, laughing and talking with the ease found only among those who meet often and whose tastes are congenial, Sam forgot about looking for his rival. In this strange social atmosphere, he felt embarrassed, awkward. He looked askance at these women in gowns that made Josephine's seem modest. The sight of the men convinced him that if he'd come in a business suit he'd have felt like an office boy. His swift glance took in the ebony grand piano, on which stood a tall vase of flowers, and the long library table with its shaded lamps at either end. Then he saw Eugénie Fragonard coming toward him.

Eugénie immediately monopolized him, leaving Josephine to look after herself, "because, dear child, you know everybody here."

Josephine saw that Sam's arrival had created a stir and felt sure that Eugénie had let it be known that her guest

of honor was a millionaire. But Sam, bewildered by Eugénie's succession of introductions, was unconscious of the attention he attracted.

"And this," said Eugénie, "is Mr. Hastings, just returned from a triumphal concert tour abroad. He's about to tell you that he has been hailed as one of the greatest among the young pianists of today, so I hasten to anticipate the announcement. And here we come to our *enfant terrible*, Hamilton Carlton, who expects soon to stun Broadway with an iconoclastic drama. This, my dear boy, is Mr. Sterling, of whom you have heard so much. I'm told you have finished another play. Are you to read it to us? No? How considerate of you! And here is Miss Morris. I present Mr. Sterling. Some day he will be coming to you with a commission to decorate his New York home. I beseech you, Mr. Sterling, don't look so emphatic a denial. Eleanor, it doesn't mean that he will choose another decorator, but that he doesn't intend to have the house. But we shall see. Even men sometimes change their minds. . . . Ah! Mr. Sterling, the omens are propitious, for next we come to an architect. Permit me to introduce Mr. Ransome. Gilbert, I prophesy that you will be asked to design the house for Mr. Sterling that Eleanor is to decorate. We must all combine, you know, to keep Mr. Sterling in New York. By the way, I think that cathedral design of yours in last Sunday's paper abominable. Why experiment, when you are a master of Gothic? I know you agree with me, Mr. Sterling. We met only a few days ago, but that signifies nothing. I feel that I've known you all my life. I trust you feel the same toward me. . . . Ah! Good evening, Willard. You're late. I feared you weren't coming. So relieved. Mr. Sterling, Mr. Willard Remington Stone. I use the full name, as Mr. Stone sets the example by publishing it at the head of all his dramatic criticisms. It's a name that playwrights and actors despise

or worship according to the criticisms they receive. If you were an actor, Mr. Sterling, I should warn you that Mr. Stone could make you a celebrity or cast you into oblivion with a stroke of the pen. But, as it is, you can feel that you're free to cultivate or ignore him as you please. . . . Behold! There's our charming Josephine talking with Mr. Stanhope, who arrived from Europe but yesterday. He and I stand to Josephine in loco parentis, while she is in this city of heart desolation. But we shall both feel superseded, happily, mind you, while you are here. . . . Winthrop, I'm delighted to see you again. How fit you're looking. . . . You will need no formal introduction to Mr. Sterling. I'm sure you feel as I do, that he is an old friend."

Sam put out his hand. "I'm glad to meet you, sir," he said, heartily. And he meant it. There was something about Stanhope that he liked on the instant.

Stanhope took the hand with a firm grasp. "This is a pleasure, Mr. Sterling, I have long looked forward to. I hope I may see something of you while you are in town."

Sam said that nothing would please him better. And they began to talk with as much ease as if the oil industry and literature were kindred occupations.

"Our erstwhile languishing Winthrop has returned to us quite transformed," said Eugénie to Josephine.

"He certainly has changed. He looks taller and stronger. Even his voice is different. I expect it's because he's been out of doors so much."

"How unromantic you are!" exclaimed Eugénie. "Now I, being steeped in sentiment, always credit any such transformation in man or woman to an affair of the heart. I'm sure Mr. Stanhope has realized his fate while away." She looked at Josephine, innocently. "Who can it be, do you suppose? You may be assured she's musical, for he has always said he couldn't live with a woman who wasn't a

musician. But why am I standing here gossiping, and neglecting my duty as hostess? Mr. Sterling, I shall not allow Mr. Stanhope to monopolize you any longer. Winthrop, you should invite Mr. Sterling to lunch, if you want him to yourself."

"You are clairvoyant. I have just asked him for tomorrow."

"I made a clairvoyant guess about you to Josephine but a moment ago. You encourage me to believe I was right in that also. Now, Mr. Sterling, I'm going to take you to my young friend, Alice Ormond, known among us as Petite Alicia. She's an actress, adored by New York in ingénue parts."

Eugénie went off on the arm of Sam, who, since his meeting with Stanhope, began to feel rather at home among these strange people. With Eugénie he was at ease, except when he saw her back, revealed in a tapering V to the waist.

Josephine watched them as they crossed the room. Sam did look really stunning in his evening clothes. No one would dream he'd never worn a dress suit before.

Stanhope thought: "She is very beautiful tonight. But she has changed. She is more the woman."

"What was the clairvoyant guess Miss Fragonard made to you about me?" he asked her.

She turned to him with a mischievous smile. "She said you were in love with a musician."

He looked so disconcerted that she laughed, gaily. "So it's true! May I congratulate you?"

With an effort he recovered himself. But Josephine pushed her advantage. "How could you leave her and come back?"

Stanhope breathed easier. So she thought he was in love with someone on the other side!

"I crossed the ocean to forget her," he said, and re-

gretted the words the moment they were uttered. Her quick answer told him she was far from divining the truth.

"I don't believe you. You don't look a bit broken-hearted. Tell me, is she musical?"

He evaded her eyes as he said, quietly, "I shall never marry a woman who is not musical."

She thought she had offended him. Should she tell him she was only joking; that she didn't believe he was in love at all?

"Of course, if I really thought it was true, I wouldn't joke about it," she said, shyly.

"Of course, I know you don't believe I am in love," he replied. His smile puzzled her. Was it true, after all?

"And you?" he asked. "Has music still the first claim on your heart?"

She lowered her eyes. "Yes," she said, tremulously.

Stanhope looked at her closely for a moment.

"We must find an opportunity soon for a long talk. I have much to tell you about the Holbrookes, and you must tell me about Brandt and the lessons."

She said she would like it very much. And he must tell her all about his trip. Then, murmuring some excuse, she left him.

Stanhope saw her stop when she reached the library table in the center of the room. She took up a book, at random, and turned the leaves idly. He saw Sam go to her. . . . Sterling was deeply in love. That was evident. But what about her? She had acted as if thrown off her guard when he asked if music still had first claim on her heart. Was Sterling in her thoughts? He was a fine young man, and rich—but—

Eugénie Fragonard tapped him lightly on the arm with her fan. She laughed a low mocking laugh.

"Your face betrays you, Winthrop. I will enlighten you.

You have a dangerous rival, but his name is not Sam Sterling."

"Another clairvoyant guess?" asked Stanhope, coolly.

"I would it were."

"Do you expect me to turn interrogator?"

"I haven't the time to parry with you. Seriously, Winthrop, I speak the truth. Your rival is dangerous to her."

"You assume I would be concerned regarding a rival?"

"Stuff! Do you take me for a fool? I know you're in love with her. More so than when you went away."

"Any man should feel honored by such an accusation," said Stanhope, with smiling formality.

"But I hope no other man would take the news of a rival so indifferently."

"That would depend on whether he intended to attempt winning her."

Eugénie shrugged her shoulders. "Imbecile! Get thee to a monastery. But you won't. You'll be moving heaven and earth to get her to the church before the year is out. It will not be an easy undertaking. A man of world renown blocks the way."

"Quite the language of the professional clairvoyant."

"But your rival," said Eugénie, suavely, "cannot lead her to the church, as he has performed that holy pilgrimage with another."

Stanhope gave her a startled glance. "Do you mean——"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"Who is he?" The question came sharply.

"I shall choose my own time to tell you." Eugénie lifted her train and threw it over her arm. "Now I must turn from love to beer. We need some more for the rarebit."

Stanhope did not attempt to detain her. His eyes were already searching for Josephine. He saw her standing by the piano at the opposite side of the room, talking with

Carlton. In the soft light, blurred by the smoke of cigarettes, she looked fragile, exquisitely appealing. It seemed impossible, he thought, that she was being inveigled into a love affair with a married man. He was of renown. What opportunity did she have of meeting such a man? Was he a musician? She had never met any famous musicians, so far as he knew. But he knew nothing of her life since she had come back in the fall. . . . A man of renown. . . . She might have met such a musician in Brandt's studio. She had been introduced to Novak there. . . . Novak! Was he the man? But, no, that was incredible. She had not the qualities to attract so intellectual a man. Her beauty might attract him, momentarily, but only so. No, it could not possibly be Novak.

When Stanhope mingled again with the guests, he saw that Sam was assisting Georgette at the serving table. As Georgette stirred various ingredients into the chafing dish, Sam, under her direction, was adding salt and paprika.

"So you are being made useful?" asked Stanhope.

Sam gave him a sidelong glance. "Humph!"

Georgette laid her hand on his. "Not too fast, Mr. Sterling. Remember, the salt comes out easier than the paprika. Oh, be careful! I can't stir in so much at once." She slipped her fingers into the palm of his hand and held it closely. "There! That's better! Just a little more. Winthrop, I'll wager you've never before seen the salt of the earth salting a rarebit. Now, Mr. Sterling, I think we have just the right flavor."

Sam set the salt cellar down with a thump. He caught Stanhope's eye. Stanhope smiled. Sam winked.

"Guess I'll look around," said Sam, and he walked over to Josephine and Carlton.

"Didn't have to look far, did he?" Georgette laughed, good-naturedly. She saw that Stanhope was not listening. She followed his gaze. "Aha! I understand, dear Win-

throp. It is quite fitting that you should look at her with the eyes of jealousy. A rival with a million—and young——”

“You’re a devil,” muttered Stanhope, turning on his heel.

“Listen to that from Winthrop!” said Georgette in a low voice to Eugénie. “Love is making him just plain human. My Lord! He’s got it worse than when he went away. Wonder what he’ll do when he discovers that she’s in love with Novak.”

Eugénie looked at her in amazement. “How did you find that out?”

Georgette was equally amazed. “So you know it, too?”

“I? Since last fall.”

“And you didn’t tell me? Eugénie, I thought you were my friend!”

“Hush! Don’t talk so loud. Tell me, quickly. How did you hear about it?”

Georgette carefully lowered the flame under the chafing dish before she answered. “I discovered a few days ago that she was in love with someone. But I was knocked silly when I found out who it was. Alicia told me. I can’t understand why I hadn’t heard it before. It seems there’s no end of gossip about them. They went down to the sea, some place on Long Island, yesterday. And they were down there not long ago, at the Island Club for lunch. Think of that little nobody roping in Novak! My word! How did she do it!”

Eugénie looked genuinely concerned. “If you tell anyone about this, Georgette, I’ll renounce you forever.”

“I would even endure the martyrdom of holding my tongue to hold your friendship, dear Eugénie. But, believe me, she’s in a mighty dangerous position.”

“As if I didn’t know it! I’ve been worrying about her for weeks. The only thing that’s saved her is, the

doxical to cite Hastings as a model in anything. But Hastings, the pianist, commands my unstinted admiration. Why is he what he is today? Because he had the courage, years ago, to step out of the ranks of the swift, who rush headlong over obstacles, and join the slow-paced but sure-footed ones who take the time to clear such obstacles wholly from their path. Hastings might have made his *début* years ago, and achieved a temporary success. But he had the artistic integrity to seek something more in his art than his own exploitation. And I believe he also had the intellectual comprehension to realize that youth has little to give the world through interpretation, other than youth's enthusiasm. Now, past thirty, he can offer his listeners something more than a young man's dazzling achievement."

"Am I to understand that you think me over-zealous to achieve a youthful success?" asked Carlton, somewhat ruefully, as he too rose.

"Is not drama intended to interpret life or character?"

"Yes."

"To interpret life or character one must have gone deeper than mere impressions. And youth is the age of impressions."

"But you seem to deny inspiration," protested Carlton.

"No. But it is possible that what you might call inspiration, I should call enthusiasm. But come, we must not fall into an argument at such a time as this."

Georgette, who was serving the rarebit, called to Carlton to come and help. Stanhope, joining the group still gathered about the piano, found himself beside Sam.

"How did you enjoy the music?" he asked.

Sam took a long puff at his cigar before he answered: "Sort of took my breath away. But what does such a husky fellow want to play the piano for? That's a woman's work."

Ransome, standing nearby, gave Sam an amused look.

Ransome was a short dark man of forty, with high forehead, thin-lipped mouth, and aggressive chin.

"As all the great music was composed by men, Mr. Sterling, why in the devil's name shouldn't men play it?"

"That sounds like sense," said Sam, coolly. "Guess I'm prejudiced."

Georgette handed Stanhope a plate of rarebit.

"If it's like rubber, don't blame me. Hastings played just at the wrong time. Wanted to tell him to wait. But before he'd played two minutes I didn't care what happened to the rarebit."

Hastings made his way to a lounging chair into which he threw himself with a yawn. "Now who's going to bring me some more of that rarebit? And I want some beer, too."

Petite Alicia of the large blue eyes and alluring blond hair, made him a sweeping curtsy. "Your majesty, I will serve you." And she floated to the serving table in a series of pirouettes, much to Hastings' glee.

Josephine, who had been sitting quietly by herself since Hastings played, turned her eyes away from him. After a time she rose and went over to Sam and Stanhope, who were standing together by the long open bookcase. Sam held a book in his hands.

"So you don't approve of Mme. Remusat?" Josephine heard Stanhope say.

"Never read her book," answered Sam. "But I don't think much of getting history in this sort of way. Too much gossip about it."

Stanhope smiled a welcome to Josephine, then turned back to Sam. "Hasn't someone defined memoirs as the backstairs of history?"

Sam laughed. "That's good. Well, I'll take my history straight. Don't like that sort of stuff. Or historical novels, either."

Josephine saw that the two men had laid their plates on top of the bookcase. "Don't you want some more rare-bit?" she asked.

"Not me," replied Sam, emphatically.

"I, too, have had quite enough," said Stanhope.

Sam put the volume of memoirs back into the bookcase. Josephine watched him as he stood, a hand in his pocket, looking about the room.

"How do you like the party, Sam?"

"Humph! Fair! I'd like it better if it weren't for those women smoking. Thought at first they were just fooling. But some of them have been smoking right along, same as the men. I think it's not decent."

"I think it's horrid, too. But you have to get used to it if you live in New York. Don't you, Mr. Stanhope?"

Stanhope admitted he had managed to become used to it. Sam said that might be, but he could never stand seeing much of it.

"Now look at that nice little girl Miss Fragonard introduced me to," he added, indicating Petite Alicia, who was perched on the arm of Hastings' chair, and bending down to light a cigarette from his. He held a glass of beer in one hand, and had an arm about Alicia's waist.

"Look at her," said Sam. "She's just an innocent little thing and doesn't know what she's doing. That fellow ought to have his face smashed for leading her on like that."

Stanhope laughed. "From what I know of Petite Alicia, Mr. Sterling, I'm sure she wouldn't hesitate to smash Mr. Hastings' face herself if she felt he deserved the rebuff."

"I read in the paper just the other day that some man spoke to her in a restaurant and she took off her slipper and hit him in the face with the heel," said Josephine.

Sam said he didn't believe it. That was just a newspaper yarn. Why, she was nothing but a little girl. Ought to

be at home with her mother instead of on the stage in New York and gallivanting around by herself.

Josephine was amused. Even she knew the first time she met Alicia that she wasn't such an innocent little thing. Sam was so funny, and a real dear, too.

Sam pulled on his cigar and stared moodily at Alicia. "I never would have believed that a girl like that would smoke."

Carlton interrupted. "Can you tell me the date of Novak's next recital, Miss Prescott?"

Josephine did not answer for a moment. Then, with a slight toss of the head, she said:

"Novak's next recital? How should I be expected to know about it?"

Carlton looked surprised. "Some of us were trying to recall when he is to play here again, but couldn't remember. I thought you might know as you go to so many concerts."

She opened and closed her fan as she answered: "I believe he isn't to play here again until he returns from his trip out West."

"I had forgotten about that western trip. What a loss those weeks will be to New York!"

"I guess we can stand it," said Josephine, with a strained laugh.

"Who is this fellow you're talking about?" asked Sam.

Stanhope answered:

"One of the greatest violinists that ever drew a bow."

"Humph! I don't think much of men who go around playing the fiddle."

"You would change your mind were you to hear Novak," said Carlton, quickly.

"Suppose you've heard him, haven't you, Josie?" asked Sam.

"Yes."

"Are you crazy over him, too?"

The color came to her cheeks. "I'm not as enthusiastic about him as the rest are."

"But some day you also will be among his worshipers," said Carlton. He turned to Sam. "We all envy Miss Prescott because she has met Novak."

"You must think he's a big one if you feel that way about anyone who's met him," replied Sam. "Say, Josie, you'll have to introduce me to him. Then I can go back to Parksburg and brag about having met him."

"As if I could introduce Novak to anyone!"

"Oh! So you don't really know him?"

The color left her face. "No," she said, in a low voice.

Carlton asked with a smile, "Have you so soon forgotten that you met him at Brandt's last spring?"

She looked up, defiantly. "Do you call meeting a man once knowing him?"

Stanhope, who had been standing with his eyes intent on her, said, "Miss Prescott, no doubt, thinks you are making much ado about nothing."

"Yes! That's just what I think, Mr. Stanhope!"

Petite Alicia came fluttering up. "Beloved Carlton, do give me some cigarettes. That beast of a Hastings says that for every one he gives me I must pay a forfeit. And I said, nothing doing. Voilà! Thanks, dear boy." Carlton struck a match. Alicia blew it out. "From yours, if you please." She whirled about, and, throwing her head back on Carlton's shoulder, turned her face up to his, the cigarette between her lips. He bent down to her, and the cigarette was lighted.

"You're a blessed little devil," he said, with a laugh.

She blew the smoke into his face. "Wouldn't I make a lovely Carmen to your Don José?" Then, seeing Sam standing up very straight and very red in the face, she made a rush at him with outstretched arms.

"My Toreador!"

Sam looked as if he might accept the challenge. Alicia drew back in mock alarm. "Another time, gallant Escamillo." She transferred her attention to Josephine. "I saw you coming out of the Metropolitan Museum one day last week, but you wouldn't speak to me."

"The museum? I didn't see you," faltered Josephine.

Alicia winked. "No wonder."

Josephine drew back. Fright and confusion showed in her face.

"Haven't I heard you say you didn't care for Novak?" asked Alicia with a tantalizing laugh.

Josephine felt the eyes of the three men on her, but she did not look at them.

"Yes," she said, her voice scarcely audible.

Alicia laughed another tantalizing laugh, and went back to Hastings.

As if by common impulse, Stanhope and Carlton moved away together.

Josephine, pale, her eyes downcast, opened and closed her fan, nervously.

Sam watched her keenly. So it was that fiddler who was after her. Why was she trying to cover it up? Why was she so scared when she was asked about him? Why did she say she didn't know him? He was dead sure that was the fellow she was in love with. But why didn't she want anyone to know she knew him?

Josephine turned and reached for the plates on top of the bookcase. "I must take these away," she said, without looking at Sam. "You don't mind?"

"No."

Sam waited until he saw her busy herself at the serving table. Then he went straight to Stanhope, who was standing alone by the piano, ostensibly looking over some music.

"Do you suppose we could get this Novak fellow to play

for us out in Parksburg? We're going to have some fine entertainments as soon as the new opera house is finished."

Stanhope gave Sam a sharp look.

"I doubt it."

"Suppose he's pretty high-priced, isn't he?"

"Yes. Probably a thousand dollars for a recital."

"A thousand dollars! I should call that plain graft."

"But he is a very great artist, Mr. Sterling."

"Humph! Seems to me everybody here tonight is an artist of one kind or another."

"Exactly. Of one kind or another, and mostly another kind than Novak's."

"Well, I don't think much of these foreign artists who come over here and rake in our dollars to spend on the other side." Sam was silent a moment. Then he said, with forced indifference, "Don't suppose Novak will be likely to drop in here tonight, do you?"

Stanhope gave no indication that he understood what was back of the question.

"No, Mr. Sterling, he will not be likely to drop in here tonight. And to return to the money he makes. Why shouldn't he make it? He has spent some thirty years in unceasing work to reach his present position. If he were a business man, wouldn't you feel he had the right to reap as rich a benefit from his industry as possible? Then, too, there are his wife and son. He has their future as well as their present welfare to provide for."

"He's married!" Sam's voice rang with relief.

"Yes, he maintains a home in Poland for his wife, and, I have heard, is educating his son at a French university."

"Well, I guess that does seem a good reason for his making all the money he can," admitted Sam. Then he stood, so absorbed in his own thoughts, he did not notice that Stanhope had left him.

So it wasn't the fiddler after all. For he was married. He was mighty glad. Wouldn't be the ghost of a chance for him to meet a fellow like that and size him up. But why had Josie acted so scared when they asked her questions about him? Perhaps he was trying to carry on a flirtation with her. These foreign musicians that came over here were a bad lot. Didn't know how to treat a woman. This fellow Novak probably spotted Josie because she was beautiful and innocent. But Josie had said she didn't know him. She'd only met him. Perhaps she'd just happened to come out of the museum when he did. And that little actress thought it would be smart to tease her about it. Perhaps all this crowd she was going with would do the same thing. Josie wouldn't like that. She would think it was a slur on her to be teased about a married man. If that was what they were doing, he would let them all know that it must be stopped. He'd see to that all right. . . . But who was she in love with? The fellow wasn't here tonight. Well, he wouldn't leave New York until he found out.

His face softened. . . . Josie ought not to be here in this big city, alone. And this wasn't any sort of crowd for her to go with. Well, he was mighty glad he had come to New York. And if she was being bothered about that fiddler, just because she'd happened to meet him once or twice, he'd see that that sort of talk didn't go on any longer. It must be about time to take her home. Must be near twelve. He'd see if she was ready to go.

Eugénie, watching Sam from the divan, laughed, softly.

"What amuses you?" asked Ransome, who had seized this opportunity to talk to her.

"The thing that always amuses me—a man in love."

Ransome eyed her, jealously. "Someone's been proposing to you this evening. You needn't deny it."

"As if I should want to deny it! I should cry it from

the housetops. The truth is, I haven't had a proposal for two years."

"You haven't?" snapped Ransome. "Well, what do you call my——?"

"I call it an old story."

"To be continued," said Ransome, grimly.

Eugénie fanned herself, languidly. "Serial stories do not interest me."

Ransome's smile was both gracious and aggravating. "You are most fascinating when most disagreeable."

"How rude of you to tell me I am seldom fascinating. Now I must leave you and go to our great man from the provinces, whom I have neglected for the last half hour. Do you know, he actually likes me? Oh, I can do it when I please, I assure you. If it weren't that I feel he is just the man for our delectable Josephine, I should win him for myself. With what artistic prodigality I could spend his million! Alas! You have detained me so long I am too late to have a tête-à-tête with him. He's going to his inamorata. And there is Hastings seeking her, too. What a magnet a pretty girl, be she ever so uninteresting, is to man!"

Hastings was the first to reach Josephine's side. "Never like to see a beauty with the blues. What's the matter?"

She looked up, startled. "I'm not blue. Just a little tired."

He pulled up a chair. "Well, come on and talk to a fellow. How you getting along with Brandt?"

"Oh, I had a wonderful lesson yesterday."

"That so? Glad to hear it."

Josephine went on as if she had not noticed that Sam had come up. "I was so encouraged. Brandt didn't criticize me once. He let me play the whole lesson through, just as if it had been a recital."

Hastings gave a low whistle.

"Mr. Hastings is surprised to find I'm that far along," said Josephine to Sam. But she did not look at him.

"Well, I'm not," said Sam.

Hastings chuckled. "You know The Koubek says of Brandt: 'Ven he say notink, I know vhat he tink.'"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Josephine, looking at him doubtfully.

"Just remember this, chérie. With Brandt it's always a case of whom he loveth he chasteneth."

"Then he must love me, for until yesterday he's always scolded me and made me feel like a nobody."

"Forget yesterday. That's my advice."

"Indeed, I couldn't forget it. Oh, Mr. Hastings, how wonderfully you played tonight! I could never do the Revolutionary Etude like that, if I practiced all my life."

"No woman could. Takes too much muscle."

"If it's muscle that does it, guess I could play it better than you," was Sam's comment.

Hastings grinned. "Mustn't expect me to say it takes genius. That would be stealing the critics' thunder. Aha! There's Alicia making love to Stone. Can't have that."

"I don't think much of that fellow," said Sam as he watched Hastings swagger over to Alicia.

"I don't care for him, either. But he plays magnificently. And he's very well educated, too."

"Humph! I think he has too good an opinion of himself."

"Oh, he just puts that on. He's really very modest about his work."

"Well, he has a queer way of showing it. And he's coarse. Now look at what he's doing. I call that scandalous."

Josephine did not need to look. She had already seen that Hastings had lifted Alicia and placed her on the library table. "Come, sing us a song!" he shouted.

Alicia put out her arms toward Sam. "Escamillo!"

Sam turned his back on her. "Don't you think we'd better be going, Josie? The cab must be here. I ordered it for twelve."

Josephine said she was tired and would be glad to go. But they must find Miss Fragonard first and say good night to her.

Eugénie, when she found that they were leaving, assumed a maternal air.

"Yes, take our lovely Josephine home. These late hours are bad for her. Indeed, bad for all of us. It has been such a pleasure to have you here tonight, Mr. Sterling. All have expressed delight at meeting you. It was good of you to let me have you for an entire evening. I know you must be crowded with engagements. You capitalists can be masters of everything but your own time. I'm told one pays a price for fame. Do you object to paying it?"

"Haven't received any bill of that kind yet," said Sam with a laugh. Miss Fragonard was nice and kind even if she did look so fast. But he was glad Josie was going to get out of this noisy crowd. It was high time, in his opinion.

When Sam entered the room where the men had left their coats and hats, he found Stanhope and Carlton getting ready to go. He heard Carlton say: "What's all this talk about Novak pursuing her? Anything in it?"

Stanhope drew his coat from a pile heaped on a chair. "No, just gossip. People must have something to talk about, you know."

"If it's true you can hardly blame him. She's a beauty."

Sam stepped forward. "Who's Novak pursuing?"

The two men turned toward him, Carlton with a start, Stanhope slowly. Carlton was silent. Stanhope, as he drew on his coat, said deliberately:

"Miss Fragonard."

Sam looked at him suspiciously. "She isn't a beauty."

Stanhope buttoned his coat and began to draw on his gloves. "There are different standards of beauty, Mr. Sterling." He spoke as if the subject had no interest for him. "It's not many years since an artist made himself the talk of New York through his portrait of Miss Fragonard, which was exhibited in one of our galleries."

There was a moment's silence. "Humph!" said Sam. "She isn't my style of beauty." Then, after a pause: "But I like her. She's good-hearted."

"Yes, very good-hearted," assented Stanhope, cordially. "By the way, Sterling, what about giving me a cigar? I have only cigarettes. They're too ephemeral to smoke when one is wrapped to the chin. Thanks. I'll call for you tomorrow, a little before one. Come, Carlton, if you are going with me."

Josephine was waiting when Sam came into the hall. "What made you so long?"

Sam pulled his coat collar up about his ears. "I was talking with those fellows about Novak." He opened the door into the outer hall and looked at Josephine sharply as she passed out before him. "They say that everybody's gossiping about how he's running after Miss Fragonard."

Josephine arranged her scarf about her head, her arms shielding her face. "They said—that Novak—is running after Miss Fragonard?"

"Yes. And that young Carlton said he didn't blame him because she's such a beauty." Sam spoke with seeming indifference. "I said I didn't see anything beautiful about her. But Mr. Stanhope said an artist had painted a picture of her once that made a lot of talk."

Josephine did not speak until they were in the elevator. Then she said, unconcernedly:

"So you don't think Miss Fragonard is beautiful? Well, I do. And I don't wonder that Novak likes her."

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN, at one o'clock the next day, Sam sat opposite Stanhope at a table in the restaurant of the University Club, he was as self-possessed as his host. Stanhope's sure reading of men had told him that Sam would like this masculine atmosphere better than the exciting show of the fashionable restaurant. And he was gratified to see that in this setting of generous comfort Sam seemed more than ever the man of firm character.

As they lunched they talked together, as two men of widely differing tastes and attainments talk when each respects the other's work. Sam wanted to know about Stanhope's book, about his travels, his life in New York. Stanhope wanted to know about the oil fields; how they were worked; how the crude was converted into the refined product; what effect a gusher like the Sterling Strike had on the general run of the business. And both men talked politics. Stanhope discovered that Sam was not only well informed on politics, but knew history as few young men of his acquaintance knew it. Sam acknowledged that he wasn't "long on" fiction, but he thought that a man who could write a good novel was "mighty smart." But facts were what interested him. Some day he was going to read Gibbon's "Rome." He'd been too busy so far, but hoped to begin it before long.

And throughout it all, one thought was dominant in Sam's mind. But he would choose his time to speak.

He waited until the relaxation of coffee and cigars. They were sitting in that unconstrained silence that bespeaks good understanding, when, looking directly at Stanhope, he said:

"There's something I want to ask you, as man to man. Did you tell me the truth last night, when you said it was Miss Fragonard that fiddler, Novak, is running after?"

Stanhope showed his dismay. But he recovered himself, quickly.

"Why should you doubt me?"

Sam ignored the question. "If it was Miss Prescott Carlton was talking about, you did right to lie. It was no time for the truth. But I want the truth now."

Stanhope did not hesitate. "I lied because, as you have said, it was no time for the truth."

Sam leaned forward and extended his hand. Stanhope took it with a strong grasp. The two men looked at each other as men who understand without speech. Then each resumed his cigar.

Sam spoke first. "You've been square with me. I'll be square with you." He settled himself sideways in his chair, an arm resting on the back, and crossed one knee over the other. He puffed his cigar with long, slow puffs. His face softened. Then he went on slowly, without looking at Stanhope.

"I suppose you know I want to marry Josie Prescott. I came here hoping to get it settled. She knows it. I told her. She thinks it is settled. I don't. It won't be settled for me until it's settled my way, or," he hesitated, "until she's going to marry someone else. She says there isn't anyone else she wants to marry or who wants to marry her. I'm telling you this because, if I'm the only man who cares for her in that way, I'm the man to settle with that fiddler." He turned and brought his fist down on the table. "And, by God! I'll do it! I'll do it, the same as if she was my wife. I'll settle him so he'll never show his face to her again."

Sam's face was resolute, his eyes were hard. He waited for Stanhope to speak. But Stanhope said nothing.

The waiter came, silently, with brandy. Sam took his at a swallow. Stanhope started to lift his glass, then set it down. The waiter went away.

Sam straightened up and leaned back in his chair. "Well?" he asked, curtly.

Stanhope brushed the hair back from his forehead. When he spoke, it was as if weighing his words.

"Any man in your position"—he flushed slightly—"would feel as you feel. But you must remember that you are basing your conclusions on supposition and gossip. Neither you nor I know, absolutely, that there is anything in all this. A man in Novak's position cannot be seen once with a woman, be she young or old, without causing gossip. And even were all this talk based on sufficient facts to justify it, active interference with a man like Novak would do nothing but harm. I advise you to wait."

"You want me to wait while people are saying that a married man is running after Josie Prescott?"

"Yes, I ask you to wait until you know more than you know now."

"Why, if she thought I knew about it, and didn't do anything, just sat back and waited, she'd——" Sam stopped as if from sheer inability to find words.

"It's a dangerous, as well as a delicate matter, Mr. Sterling, for a man to take the initiative in such an affair, unless asked to do so by the woman."

"Do you suppose I'm going straight to that fellow? Well, that isn't my way, any more than it would be the way of any decent man. I'm going to her. I'm going to tell her that I stand ready to fix that man so he'll let her alone after this. And that I'm not going to leave this town until this gossip about her is stopped. And I know Josie Prescott well enough to feel sure she'll be glad to hear it."

Stanhope, his eyes lowered, had the look of a man

who is thinking carefully. Gradually an expression of decision came to his face. He pushed back his chair.

"An excellent course to pursue, Mr. Sterling. And Miss Prescott will no doubt feel grateful to you for your interest. I hope you will find that the matter has been much exaggerated. Will you have another cigar? Good. I thought we might take a walk, but if you have an engagement——"

"Yes, I have an engagement," said Sam, significantly.

CHAPTER XXII

SAM, as he walked down Fifth Avenue from the University Club to Thirty-eighth Street, was nearer happiness than he had been since the night of his arrival in New York. He was going to do something for Josie. Something that no other man could do for her.

He'd settle that fiddler! The damned sneak!

No wonder Josie had acted scared when his name was mentioned. It was enough to scare any decent girl to have a married man running after her. And to know that people were talking about it. He could see now why she hadn't seemed like herself since he'd been here. With a thing like that on her mind she couldn't be natural. She hadn't wanted him to find out about it. That was plain enough. Perhaps she was afraid he'd blame her, too. As if he could think of doing that. He knew her better than she thought he did. Josie could no more let a married man pay attention to her than she could steal.

It was a good thing he hadn't waited any longer to come to New York. Josie needed him. He knew, just as well as if it had all happened, that she'd be relieved when she found he was going to settle this fiddler business for her so she wouldn't have to worry any more, and was going to see that this gossip was stopped right now. He'd stay until everything was made nice and easy for her. He'd stay until he won her for himself.

Who was that fellow who telephoned her? Someone who was mighty sweet on her, that was sure. And she'd looked mighty sweet when she talked to him. She'd looked——

But what was the use of thinking about that? She wasn't

engaged to anybody. And as long as she was free he'd never give her up. He'd never stop trying to win her, no matter if she did seem in love with some other fellow. And perhaps she wasn't in love. Perhaps she was just sort of fascinated by someone. He didn't believe it'd be easy for any man to get her. She was just the kind of girl, so sweet and beautiful, that the fellows would always be running after. Well, he could run as fast as the rest of them. Faster. . . . Fifth Avenue certainly was a fine street. Didn't wonder that Josie was crazy over it. Might get crazy over it himself, if he stayed here long enough. But a million wouldn't go very far among these people. He'd rather live in a quieter town and come here once in a while to have a gay time. But it wasn't any place for a girl like Josie to be in by herself. What she needed was someone to look after her. She didn't know anything about the world. That was just the reason that fiddler had spotted her. If he could get hold of him he'd wring his neck. And he'd get hold of him. He'd make him sorry he ever spoke to Josie Prescott.

When Sam reached the apartment he found Josephine dressed for the street.

"Guess I've come at the wrong time," said he. "Was out for a walk and thought I'd just drop in. But you're going some place."

She took off her coat. "No, I've just come in. I had to go on an errand." She spoke quickly, in a tremulous voice. As she took off her hat, she asked, "Did you and Mr. Stanhope have a good time?"

"Fine. I like that fellow."

"And he likes you. I saw that as soon as he met you. I expect you two would be great friends, if you lived here in New York."

"Now, if you want to get at your practicing, Josie, you just say so. I'm not going to interfere with your work."

She stood before the mirror, smoothing her hair. "Oh, I'm all through with my work for today. I'm glad you came in. It seems so like home when you're around, Sam."

She was talking thoughtlessly, her mind on the wonderful hour she had just spent with Novak.

Sam's hopes soared. Josie was happy because he was there!

She turned from the mirror. "I'm going to make some tea."

"Tea! Do you think I want to drink tea in the middle of the afternoon, like a sewing circle? Not me!"

"Well, I do. I'm cold and hungry after my walk."

"Humph! When I'm hungry I want a beefsteak, not tea. But go ahead. I'll drink it. I'll drink it by the gallon if you want me to." And Sam laughed, joyfully.

He started to follow her to the kitchen, but she said, no, he would only bother her. Left to himself, he walked about the room, his hands in his pockets, whistling softly. Josie was glad he was here. And this Novak business wasn't going to be as hard to tackle as he'd thought. He could see that she was sort of depending on him now. He couldn't say just what it was that made him know this, but he knew it all the same. She'd be more than pleased when she found out he was going to get rid of that fellow for her. The blackguard! He'd settle him!

As for himself, well, you bet he'd stay on the job till he got her.

She came in, pulling the tea wagon after her. Sam sprang to help her.

"What's this contraption? A tea wagon? Never saw one before. Sort of convenient, isn't it? Say, Josie, I was going to take your Aunt Mary a present from New York. Why not one of these things? Wouldn't she enjoy springing it on Parksburg?"

"No, because there is one in Parksburg."

"That so? Who's got it?"

"Susie Hatfield."

"She has, has she? Well, no wonder I didn't know it, seeing I don't like that little snip."

"She's a nice homey girl, even if she does act flighty." Josephine laughed, teasingly. "You don't know what you're missing, Sam."

Sam grew red. He knew, as everybody in Parksburg knew, that Susie Hatfield had been running after him for years.

"Humph! Don't think much of those girls who go traipsing up and down Main Street every afternoon, and hang around drug stores in the evenings. You never did that, Josie."

She placed a chair on either side of the tea wagon. "Now you sit there, Sam, and I'll sit here. No, of course I didn't. I was too busy giving music lessons and practicing. Do you want cream or lemon in your tea?"

"How do I know?"

"Then I'll give you lemon. You may as well get used to the stylish way."

Sam tasted the tea doubtingly. "Say, Josie, this isn't half bad."

"Half bad! I should say not! I can make the best tea in all New York."

"Bet you can make the best everything in New York."

Josephine laughed. "How silly we are! But then, when I'm happy I'm always silly."

Sam beamed. "So am I."

She went on heedlessly, her thoughts far away. "Then I never saw you happy before. This is the first time I've ever known you to be silly."

"Never had a chance before." Sam's tone spoke plainer than his words.

Josephine bit her lip. She must be careful.

"Let me give you another cup, Sam. Is it too strong?"

"Didn't suppose tea could ever be too strong. Yes, I'll take some more."

As she handed him back the cup she asked, "Don't you want to smoke?"

"Smoke here? I should say not."

"But everybody smokes in New York everywhere."

"Well, I don't intend to copy the New York ways."

"I do."

"Humph! Not in smoking cigarettes, like those fool women at Miss Fragonard's, I hope."

"Goodness, no! I mean the New York ways I like."

Sam did not speak for a moment. Then he said, deliberately:

"Well, some of the men in this town have ways no decent fellow would want to copy after."

"I expect business here is awfully crooked."

"I don't mean the way they do business. That's about the same everywhere, I guess. I mean the way they conduct themselves with women." Sam's voice was cool and steady.

"Are you still thinking of the way Mr. Hastings acted with Alice Ormond at Miss Fragonard's? You can't judge New York men by him. Look at Mr. Stanhope."

"I wasn't thinking of that piano player."

"Dear me, Sam, you don't think all New York men are fast?"

"There are fast men everywhere. Got some in Parksburg. A fellow can be fast and yet have something decent about him. But married men who run after young girls don't know what decency means. They're just plain low-down blackguards."

Josephine did not answer. Sam turned to her.

"Josie," he said, earnestly, "I know all about it."

She looked at him with terrified eyes.

"You needn't look so scared. I'm going to see after this affair for you."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean this gossip that's going on about how that fiddler's running after you."

Her face blanched. "The gossip isn't—about me. It's about Miss Fragonard."

"No, Josie, it isn't about Miss Fragonard."

She could not meet his eyes. "But you said that—Mr. Stanhope said—it was."

"He was mistaken."

Her breath quickened. "How—how do you know he was mistaken?"

"It's enough that I do know, and for dead sure." Sam leaned toward her across the tea wagon. "Josie, you needn't be afraid to tell me about it. I'm not going to blame you. But as for that fiddler, well, you can leave him to me. I'll settle him so he'll never show his face to you again. I understand why you haven't wanted me to know about it. But I'm mighty glad I do know. And just let me tell you, I'm not the kind of friend to stand back and see you pestered to death by a fellow like that. I'll fix things so you won't be frightened every time his name is mentioned."

Josephine's color slowly returned. She busied herself with the tea service.

"Of course I know you're the kind of friend who would always want to help me. But—but—there isn't anything to do."

Sam did not speak for a moment. Then he said, slowly:

"See here, Josie, I don't want you to think I'm trying to interfere in your affairs. But I want you to tell me, straight out, is that fellow bothering you?"

"No."

"Well, if there's nothing in all this, I don't see how

the gossip got started, unless——” Sam straightened up. “I’ve got it! He’s been telling around that he knows you, and bragging about your liking him! Some fellows are like that. Trying to make out that all the girls are crazy over them. If he’s talked that way about you, you bet your life I’ll make him pay for it. And it’s what he’s done. I can see it clear, now. If it weren’t for you, I’d wring the damned sneak’s neck!”

“Sam, stop! You shall not call him names!” With burning cheeks, Josephine stood up and faced him, her whole body trembling.

Sam looked at her steadily. “What do you mean?”

She clasped her hands to control herself. Her eyes wavered. “He is a great artist.”

“Yes, I’ve heard all about that. And it makes what he’s doing all the worse. Isn’t that so?”

She was silent.

“What’s the matter, Josie? Are you afraid I’ll do something that will make it hard for you? Well, you needn’t worry. What I’ll do will be between that fellow and me. And he’ll never tell what happened. You may trust me to do it in a way he won’t want to brag about.”

She forced herself to say, calmly, “Novak wouldn’t say such a thing about any girl.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Sam. “But I can see why you do. You don’t know anything about men, except what’s good in them. And there’s talk about this thing. There’s no getting around that. That Carlton boy said there was a lot of talk. Well, let me tell you, Josie, men don’t bother themselves about such gossip until there’s been plenty of it. And you’ve been scared about it.”

She did not answer. Sam got up from his chair and walked over to her.

“You have been scared, haven’t you, Josie?”

“No.”

Sam looked perplexed. "Well, why did you look so scared when they asked you about him at Miss Fragonard's? For you were scared. Anybody could see that plain enough."

"I—I—was just—tired—and nervous."

"See here, Josie," said Sam, with blunt emphasis, "I guess we could talk all afternoon about this, and not get anywhere. It can be settled in a minute, anyway. All I want to know is this. If I find out for dead sure that fiddler's been saying that you're crazy over him, will you let me settle with him?"

Relief softened Josephine's drawn lips. "Yes, if you find out for sure—that—that he's been saying I'm—crazy over him."

Sam received the answer with grim satisfaction.

"Well, I've got him. I'll settle him so he won't forget me. It won't take me long to find out just what he's been saying. I'll stop people talking, like that young whipper-snapper, Carlton, who goes about saying you're being pursued by a married man. I'll fix that fiddler so he won't want to appear in public for a while. The damned low-down blackguard!"

Josephine turned upon him, her eyes blazing.

"Don't you dare talk that way about Novak! He isn't a blackguard! He's wonderful! He's splendid! He's good and kind—and tender!"

Sam stared. He took hold of her arm. "How do you know all that?"

She looked away from him. Her tense body relaxed. Slowly her face became the face he had seen when she talked to that unknown man at the telephone.

"He is my friend." The voice was low and caressing.

Sam's hand dropped from her arm. "Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?"

She was silent.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Still she was silent.

Sam's face flamed. "What does all this mean? Tell me, straight out."

She stood quite still. Then she looked up at him, her face serene and sweet.

"I love him."

Sam's face grew ashen.

"I don't understand." His voice was hoarse.

"I love him!" There was exaltation in her tone.

Sam drew back. "You love him!"

She smiled, dreamily.

He seized her by both arms. "You don't know what you're saying! You're out of your mind! You couldn't love that man! He's married! You're a good girl!"

"No, I'm not out of my mind." Her voice was gentle. "I love him."

"It isn't true, Josie!"

"It's true."

"No!"

"I would give up everything in the world for him!"

Sam's arms fell. "My God!" He walked away.

She followed him.

"Sam!"

He paid no heed.

"Sam!"

He turned a haggard face to her. "I guess there's nothing more to be said between you and me."

"Oh, Sam! You mustn't feel like that! You mustn't! It would break my heart if you——"

His laugh cut her. "Don't talk to me about your heart, when you're willing to throw it away on a scoundrel. You're not the girl I thought you. I don't know how all this happened. But there's one thing I do know. You might not have been able to keep him from running after

you, but you could have kept him from making love to you. You've kept me from doing it for years. And if you could hold me back, you could hold him back, for there's not a man on God's earth has ever loved you or ever will love you as I've done. You let him go on because you didn't want to hold him back. You wanted him to love you. Isn't that so?"

She buried her face in her hands. "Yes, I wanted him—to love me."

"No wonder you hide your face when you say it."

She looked up, fearlessly.

"I'm not ashamed. And I wouldn't be ashamed if all the world knew that I wanted him to love me. And how could I help wanting his love? He is a great and wonderful man. Yes, he's married. I knew it all the time. But, oh, Sam, I can't explain just what I mean. But can't you understand that love is something that can't always be reasoned about? If I had tried not to love him, or let him love me, I should have cared for him all the more. Something in me—I don't know what to call it, Sam—made me love him when I felt that I ought not to. That was at first. Then I felt I had a right to love him. Yes, Sam, a right. For his love for me made everything in life beautiful, and mine for him has been an inspiration in his work. And, oh, I'd rather be an inspiration to such a man than the wife of any other man on earth!"

Sam turned away from her. "Don't talk like that, Josie, for God's sake!"

"I can't talk any other way about—this."

Suddenly Sam went to her.

"I see it all now! That's the man who called you up on the telephone! You went off with him some place Saturday. That's why you kept it so secret. You knew you were doing wrong. And how do you think your being in love with a married man is going to end? Do you suppose

he cares what may happen to you? By God, no! And I'll tell you what you're going to do. You're going back to Parksburg. You're going to your Aunt Mary. You're associating here with a lot of people like that Randolph girl, who isn't fit for you to speak to. If you'd been living with decent people, this wouldn't have happened. It's because you're so innocent and sweet," Sam's voice broke, "that you can't see the wrong from the right. You think good of everybody. You can't go on like this. I'd give everything I own if I could make you see you can't go on like this.". He paused; then, slowly: "You don't know how I've loved you—how I've longed for you—how I've been glad of every dollar I've made because I thought of how I might spend it for your happiness—how for years I've never had a joy that was complete unless you were with me to share it. There can never be any joy for me after this. But I can stand that. I'll have to stand it." His face crimsoned. He clenched his hands. His voice grew harsh. "But I can't stand it to know that you—that you—— Oh, Josie, can't you see what that man wants? Must I tell you? No married man makes love to a girl without expecting she'll give him everything she'd give the man she married!"

Josephine drew back. A deathly pallor spread over her face.

"I shall never forgive you."

"Josie!"

"I shall never forgive you! Oh, you are low and mean to think such things! You can never love as Novak loves—because you are not good enough. He has never given me a look that was not beautiful. He has never said anything to me that was not noble. And you—you—oh, I hate you! If I loved you I should be ashamed. To love Novak makes me proud."

Sam stood, stricken. His face was drawn; his eyes were

lifeless. The minutes passed. He looked about him, dazed. His eyes met Josephine's. Then he turned away.

He found his hat and coat and walked slowly to the door.

"Good-by—Josie."

She did not speak.

For a moment he waited. Then he opened the door and went out.

CHAPTER XXIII

Six weeks had passed. It was a morning in April, with the sun as warm, the breeze as soft, as a morning in May. Josephine sat on a bench in Riverside Park, her music case at her side, a bunch of daffodils in her lap. There was a delicate languor in her attitude. Beneath the soft luminous happiness of her face was the impress of an emotional crisis.

She had been through days of dark apprehension. There was no remorse over the repudiation of Sam, but she had been plunged into a torment of anxiety as to what he would do. If he told Aunt Mary! This was the fear that tortured her.

When she found that Aunt Mary knew nothing except that Sam had come back hopeless of ever winning her, she abandoned herself to her happiness with intensified ecstasy. She was never to know that Sam had gone to Stanhope and told him all. That he would not have left New York if he had not believed that, while he could do nothing to curb her infatuation, Stanhope might do much. She would have felt no pity for Sam, if she could have seen him as Stanhope saw him, overwhelmed with misery, yet thinking less of his own grief than of her welfare. Her condemnation of Sam increased as her adoration of Novak grew. Novak had become more than ever the god to her because he had been judged as the man. She was lifted into the region of dreams. With exquisite anticipation she awaited his return.

As she sat in the park this morning in early April, looking off over the river to the Palisades, blurred by a shimmering haze, she lifted the daffodils from her lap, and,

holding them to her face, stroked the long, green, lush stems.

Novak came sauntering around a bend in the walk. When he reached her side he looked quietly down at her.

"I shall always remember you as you look now," said he. "You are spring incarnate."

"I thought you were not coming," she said, softly.

He sat down beside her. "My manager. I had to see him. He kept me long. But you were happy. Your face tells me so."

"Yes, I was happy."

"You were not tired after our long walk the other day?"

"No. I wasn't tired." She spoke in a low voice.

"My manager was angry that he could not find me all that afternoon. He scolded Stafford because he did not know where I had gone. I had made an appointment with the manager. But I forgot. How could it be otherwise? I had not seen you for six weeks."

"It seemed a long time—to me," she murmured. She put the daffodils in her lap and separated them until they lay, a row of slender green ending in a row of bloom. Novak took one and drew his hand along the stem. "Wonderful!" said he. "I can feel the sap of life in it."

She smiled, musingly. "My father loved the daffodils. I never knew him, I was so little when he died. But my Aunt Mary has often told me how he had them in bloom in the early spring. There was always a box filled with them in the sitting room window. I have a book of his, a book of poems, Wordsworth, and in it is one about the daffodils. It was his favorite poem. And it was the first one I ever learned by heart."

"Charming! Tell it me."

"I—I've never recited it to anyone."

"That is why you should do so to me."

She looked off over the river.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,—
A host of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay;
Ten thousand saw I, at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company;
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

"Ah! What a lyric! Exquisite! Tell it me again.
I must know it."

Slowly she repeated it. Then, without an error, he repeated it.

She looked at him in admiration. "How could you learn it so quickly?"

"That poem is pure music. It is not difficult for me to memorize music."

"You are wonderful!" There was reverence in her eyes.

Then, her voice uncertain, she said: "You are going away sooner than you thought. I saw it in the paper this morning."

"Yes."

"You are going tomorrow." She scarcely breathed the words.

"Yes, tomorrow." He hesitated. "I received a cablegram. It came while you and I were on our walk. I am called to Paris."

"Are you going to give recitals there?"

"No, I shall not play in Paris. I shall rest. One cannot rest here in America."

"You said—on our walk—that it was a rest after your long tour."

"Yes, it was a rest, fresh and charming as the spring itself."

He drew the branch of a bush toward him. "See, it is full of buds ready to open. All nature is so now. But the cold may come, and then, all is dead where a day before was so much pregnant beauty. That is like life. As uncertain of fulfillment as these buds that may never bloom."

"You should not feel that way about life! You, with all your fame!"

He smiled, bitterly. "Art is not all of life. Too often the richer the fruits of a man's art, the poorer the fruits of his happiness. I am famous. I am called a great man. But I am not happy."

She lowered her eyes. "Are you never happy?"

"You have made me happy." She caught her breath, but she did not look up. "Najdroższa," he went on, quietly, "I am going away. I do not know that I shall come back. My manager wanted me, today, to sign a contract for next season. But I would not. I fear I shall not have the courage to return. By coming to America I have twice denied myself the only great happiness I find in life."

She looked at him, startled.

He gathered the daffodils in his long flexible hands. "When I am gone the memory of you will be to me as the memory of the daffodils was to your poet. I wandered in this great country of yours, lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills, when all at once I saw—you, Najdroższa. And you have made me gay, as your poet was gay when he saw the golden flowers. A restful gayety that has made me forget the heaviness of life."

She turned her face away from him. He waited for her to speak. But she was silent.

He saw her music case. "You have come from a lesson?"

She nodded.

"You want to be a concert pianist?"

"Yes." Her voice was scarcely audible.

"That means a long hard road, Najdroższa. I shall not like to think of you pursuing it. It will take heavy toll of your youth and charm. I should rather think of you as married to a man who would nurture your gifts and protect you from the ravages of a public life."

She shrank back. "No, no! Don't talk like that!"

"Ah, Najdroższa! You do not yet know what love means. When you do know you will think your ambition but a vain thing."

She looked up, the dark eyes warm with rapture. "I know what love means! It means more than my music! More than anything in the world!"

Gently he laid the daffodils in her lap. His hand touched hers. A tremor passed over her.

"Najdroższa, you do not love me."

She leaned toward him, her hands clasped tensely. "How can you say that, when— Oh, you don't know! You can't understand how much——"

He stopped her. "You say you love me. But what is it you love? It is the artist, or, as the world calls me, the great man."

"I would give up everything for you." She spoke with solemnity.

"Yes, Najdroższa, you would give up everything for me, but it would be like the sacrifices of old, made to the gods. The ancients did not love their gods. They feared and revered them. We cannot love a thing that is apart from our lives. I could not love a woman who worshiped me. You could not love a man you worshiped."

"I shall always love you," she whispered. Then quickly: "I know what it all means. I know there can never be anything more than just—this—for me. Your wife——"

He interrupted, vehemently. "I would sever that tie without a regret, to marry the woman I love. But she cannot marry me."

She gazed at him, speechless.

His agitation passed. "I have made a confidante of you," he said, indifferently.

"Do you mean there is someone else?" she faltered.

A tolerant smile passed over his face. "Najdroższa, I have met many charming girls who have diverted me. At first you were no more to me than any of the others. But now you are more because you are different from those others. You have always been exquisite in word and act. It is not the lot of the artist to know many such. It was a fresh enchanting experience to me. You have given me happy hours. I shall not forget them."

"You do not love me? There is someone else?" The stiff lips could scarcely form the words.

He lifted his head. "There is someone else."

She sat so long silent, motionless, her eyes fixed on his face, that he touched her, tenderly. "Najdroższa!"

"You are going to Paris to see her?" she asked, faintly.

"I am going to Paris to meet her." His voice was full and strong.

She drew a long breath. "I—I thought you—loved me."

He made no answer.

"I thought you loved me. That was why I—I——" The crimson rushed to her face. She put a hand to her throbbing throat. Humiliation was in her eyes.

"Shall the charm of our hours together be diminished by regret? Is it not sufficient that we drew a full delight from friendship?"

A blight fell over her face. She drew away from him, her head drooping. She was white and still. He sat with an arm thrown negligently over the back of the bench. He waited long. But she did not move.

"Ah! Najdroższa!"

She rose, and the daffodils fell to the ground.

He was by her side. "You are going?"

"Yes, I am going."

He took her hand, and started to raise it to his lips, but she drew it away, quickly. He turned from her dark troubled gaze, and saw the daffodils scattered on the ground. "Ah! The lovely flowers!" Stooping, he picked them up. She watched him as he carefully gathered them together.

He was smiling as he stood up and held them out to her. She looked at the golden blossoms, hanging lifeless, the lush stems shrunken. "No." She raised her eyes to his face. "Good-by."

She was gone. While she was still in sight he glanced at his watch. Turning, he walked rapidly around the bend of the path by which he had come. Suddenly, with an exclamation of surprise, he stopped. He still held the daffodils. He looked at them with a reminiscent smile. Then he dropped them and went on his way.

CHAPTER XXIV

BRANDT sat at his desk opening his mail with an indifference that approached apathy. He looked tired and old. Through the open windows came the spring air, that now and then rose to a light breeze, stirring the papers before him. The Koubek went about noiselessly, setting the room in order.

Brandt opened the last letter and glanced through it. Then, with an impatient movement, he swept all the mail aside. He leaned back in his easy chair and breathed a long audible sigh.

"Ach! It comes spring!"

The Koubek's small sharp eyes grew maternal as she looked at him.

"When comes the spring comes the melancholy. Is it not so, Koubek?"

She lifted a framed photograph of Novak from the table and dusted it. "I dunno," said she, phlegmatically.

Brandt reached out his hand. "Give it to me."

She brought the picture to him. He looked at it long, holding it before him with both hands. Then he stood it on his desk. "I leave it here now."

"You say always you haf no picture on your desk."

"But this, I have it here now. I have it here comes every day. I love him like he was my son. I love him more than like he was my son. For I could not have a son so great as Novak. Nor one to understand me so as he does. Now he is gone. I am alone."

"Vhat matter? You see him soon like you see him last summer."

"Ach! I see him not this summer except perhaps comes now and then a day. I think I see him not at all."

The Koubek pursed her lips. "Vell, I tink dot cums his loss more as yours."

Brandt looked at the picture. "Comes the spring and he is happy. For he loves. Ach! Koubek, that is a wonderful thing, to love. I, too, have loved. But I love no more."

The Koubek laughed. "You luf many times already. Now, you stop. Dot iss goot."

He smiled. "Those were but pleasures." Then he sighed. "I find the happiness in love never but once."

As she dusted the door, The Koubek rattled the knob with vicious energy. She knew the Master's romance by heart. He had told it to her many times, and it never failed to rouse her resentment because it was a part of his life over which she had exercised no authority.

"Ach, Koubek," said he in a melancholy voice, "when comes the spring I am sad. But it was not always so. I have the remembrance of happy springs. You knew me not when I was like that. You knew not her. That comes a loss for you." He settled down in his chair, and, after a moment, went on, musingly: "She was like the spring, so fresh and beautiful. She was never to be like the summer, that brings so often disappointment. Nor like the autumn, that brings always the decay. She died before she knew the unhappiness. Perhaps that was well, for she loved me to the end. Perhaps it would have come she had not always done that if—yes—I think perhaps she would not always have loved me. She could not love me now, like I am, old."

The Koubek arranged the books on the table. "Vell, I tink she, also, be oldt. I tink you not luf her when she be like dot."

"Ach, I forget," said Brandt, sadly. "She also would

be old. But, no! She would never have come to be old. She was like that. But I, I am the old man. It was well she never knew me, except I was young."

"Vell, I tink she not luf you at all, if she not luf you oldt so vell as younk."

Brandt did not seem to hear. He was looking at the picture. "Ach, Novak!" said he. "Your happiness is not so great as my remembrance."

He closed his eyes, a smile hovering about his lips. The Koubek watched him, her face strangely gentle. Then she left the room, softly closing the door after her.

When, some time later, there was a knock, Brandt did not move. There was a second knock. He stirred in his chair, but did not rise until the door opened, and Josephine entered. Then he rose slowly and went to her.

"I thought you were not here," she said.

He rubbed a hand over his eyes. "Ach! I was dreaming. I dreamed I saw—but what do I talk? You must excuse. I am tired." He went to the piano as if reluctant. "Well, we now make the lesson."

"If you are tired, Mr. Brandt——"

"Always I am tired when comes the spring. And now I am more tired as ever before. We have now the lesson."

He did not look at her as she began to play. Had he done so, he might have noticed that she seemed ill and depressed. She played her Bach, and all he said was, "Well, what comes next?" She played two Chopin *Etudes* and he asked, "Well, what comes now?" She opened her Beethoven sonatas to the *D major, Opus 28*. "But I can play it without my music," she said, and closed the book.

He ran his hand through his hair. "Ach! I don't know. I think I care not to hear the Beethoven today."

"That is all I have left to play, Mr. Brandt." She spoke lifelessly.

"You play it for me already many times, I think."

"Yes, all except the last movement. I played that for the first time at my last lesson."

"I have the remembrance. That last movement, it is like the spring in the country. A pastorale. Ach! Comes a few years more, I make my home in the country, where all is peace and quiet. I like not the city, where comes always the noise and excitements. But I think you like not the country. I have the remembrance you play that movement without the sufficient simplicity."

"But I love that movement, Mr. Brandt."

"Yes, you love many things. You are young. You are happy."

"But I—I—am not—happy."

Brandt looked at her. "You have again the discouragement about the career? So?"

"My music is all there is in the world for me," she said, in a dead voice.

Brandt made no reply. He had decided to tell her that she had not the ability to become an artist. And if she had not the ability, he could no longer give her lessons. To do so would be to give her unwarranted encouragement. She had not the mind, the firmness, to become what she hoped. If she worked many years she might, perhaps, be a reasonably good artist. But it was too uncertain. At the end of many years she would no longer be young. And if she did not succeed, then she would be nothing.

These conclusions passed through his mind now. But he hesitated. It was the first time he had ever hesitated to discharge a pupil. Perhaps it was because Josephine was young, as the spring was young, that Brandt was reluctant to hurt her. Perhaps it was because he was feeling old and tired and sad, and did not want a scene. Perhaps he did not feel wholly sure that failure was before her.

Josephine looked at the volume of Beethoven on the rack. He would not let her play the sonata! Despair overwhelmed her. All she had left was her music. And Brandt had been growing indifferent. She knew it now. Knew that what she had taken as silent praise was indifference. But it was her fault. She had not been working hard enough. She had been too happy. But now she was unhappy. She was always to be unhappy. But she would work as she had never worked before. She had made her plans. And, when Brandt knew, he would be glad.

Brandt was walking up and down the room, his hands behind his back, his eyes on the floor. She rose and waited until he was near her.

"Mr. Brandt, I want to speak to you."

He looked up, but said nothing. She went on, in a low voice:

"I know I haven't been getting along well, lately, Mr. Brandt. If I could tell you why my work has been so unsatisfactory you would understand. But I can't tell anyone. I've got to bear it, just by myself. I was happy—oh, so happy—but it wasn't because of my music. But I'm not happy now. I can't ever be happy again—in that way." She raised her eyes, and in them was an unwonted expression of firmness. "I've learned many things about life that I never knew before." She smiled, bitterly. "Perhaps what I have been through will help me in my work. I ought to do better after this if being unhappy helps. I'm going to work harder than I've ever worked. I'm beginning to understand what it means to become an artist." She stepped toward him. "I'm going to be an artist." Her voice was resolute. "My Aunt Mary has made some money in oil, and she wrote me a few days ago that she can help me to keep on. I'm not going home this summer. I'm going to a place in Connecticut where a friend of mine has stayed, and I'm going to work and be ready next fall

for a better winter than I've ever had with you. I'll never let anything interfere with my music again. Never!"

Brandt had listened with a growing expression of interest. When she finished he said, blandly:

"Ach, I see. You have been in love."

She turned scarlet, then pale.

"And now it is over?" he asked.

She rested a hand on the piano to steady herself. "It will never be over."

"I have the understanding." Brandt spoke kindly. "It comes so when one is young. All that goes not well seems a tragedy. But you will have many lovers. You are beautiful. I don't know. Perhaps it is better that you marry. That comes a good thing for a girl such as you, to marry."

"No, no! I shall never marry. There will never be anything for me but my music."

"You choose for yourself a hard life." He shook his head. "I don't know. I think you have the greater happiness if you marry. If you try to be the artist you cannot marry comes many years. You have always to study and practice."

"That's what I want to do. That's all there is left for me."

Brandt's glance was keen as he said:

"But you were in love. Then you thought not of the career. So?"

"I would have given it up for him."

"Pst! Then you are like the so many other pretty young ladies who think they want the career. But comes some young man and they care no longer for music. They care only that they get married."

"No, Mr. Brandt! I'm not like that. I didn't want to marry. This was different. I can't explain. Perhaps I've done wrong. I don't know. I don't understand my-

self. All I know is, I must go on with my music. If I don't go on——"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted Brandt, irritably. "No hysterics. I care not what you say. I care only what you do." He stopped and gave her a penetrating glance. "You have been in love. But you wanted not to marry. That makes a strange thing for a girl like you."

Josephine, in confusion, walked away. She drew near the desk and saw Novak's picture. A picture showing only the splendid head against a dark background that threw the face into high relief. She stared at it, terrified and enraptured.

Brandt, thinking her offended, muttered: "These hysterics! They make me to go crazy." He walked the length of the room, and then, as he turned, he saw her staring at the photograph. For an instant his face was blank. Then he smiled a slow knowing smile.

"We talk no more about love," said he, in a matter-of-fact tone, as he went toward her. "You come not here for that. We talk about music."

Josephine started. She walked with lagging step to a chair and sank into it, her head drooping. Brandt stood leaning against the desk, his arms folded, and watched her as she grew composed. At last she looked up at him, beseechingly.

"Please be kind to me."

"Ach! Am I not always kind? When I speak your faults, then am I most kind. Now you listen. I think it may come that you play more earnest as you play before. Experience makes that. But you need many things else to become the good interpreter. I think often, comes the past weeks, I tell you this. Then I say, I do not know. Perhaps you not understand. But now—well—we shall see. If you make yourself attentive to what I am about to say, then you make yourself more the desirable pupil."

She lifted a determined face to him. "I'll practice as I've never practiced before."

"Pst! It is not more practice I want. It is more understanding."

"But I do love music. You know I do."

"I mean not that you understand more with the heart. You have sufficient of that. I mean the mind. I expect not of you the mind of maturity. I have before said this to you. I expect not of you that you play the great masters with all understanding. But if you have the full talent you should play them with better understanding as you do. You think music is all just the emotion. Well, I tell you it is better as that. If it had only the emotion it could not live. It would be nothing more as the fruit that ripens today and tomorrow falls to the earth. But it is more as that. It is like a tree that is beautiful in everything. The fruit, the leaf, the branch, the trunk, the root. The tree is beautiful in winter, when you see only the form. It is not until you see that it can be beautiful without the leaf or the fruit that you can know how beautiful it is when comes the fruit. What makes the tree blossom when comes the spring? It is because the root is ever nourished. That brings strength and fruition. It is so with music. The composer, the interpreter, must ever nourish the root to make his art strong and beautiful. He must love more as the blossom or the fruit. But you have not that understanding. That is why you play all the so great composers like they have not the beauty of form. It is not until you see that beauty in form that you can reveal it to others. And if you reveal it not, then you make of music but the incoherence. You understand what I mean when I speak so?"

Josephine, distressed, nervous, pushed the hair away from her forehead. "Yes, I think I understand."

"But there is yet more," went on Brandt, deliberately.

"It is not sufficient that you know only music. You must comprehend other arts. For all the arts are united. You must make your mind broad that your art may be broad. That is why the young never play with the full intelligence. But even the young should show good signs of intelligence. If they seek but to astonish, then I say to you they make for themselves but a poor promise for the future. If they have the intelligence of restraint, then it comes a good promise for what they may become. If you make yourself intelligent in ways outside of music, and if it comes you learn the restraint, then you promise well. But if it comes not that you do so, then always will your music be but as a foolish thing to amuse the foolish listener. The intelligent listeners, they go more and more to hear the interpreters who have the strong root to their art. The strong root makes the beautiful lasting emotion. And how do you get the strong root? By feeding on many things that nourish the mind, even as the root of the tree feeds on many things from the earth. If it comes you do that, then your lessons will bear fruit. But if you do not so—well—then you accomplish nothing, no matter how much you practice."

Brandt broke off abruptly, and again began his pacing back and forth. He muttered to himself. Josephine heard the words: "I don't know. I don't know."

She rose from her chair, and, going to the piano, gathered up her music and put it in the case. Then she walked over to Brandt.

"Mr. Brandt, I never studied with a great teacher until I came to you. I never met big people until I came to New York. It has taken me nearly two years to see why no one here really cares for my music. But I'm beginning to see now. At home I was always praised. Everyone looked on me as a prodigy. I'm still young, only twenty-one, but I'm too old to be looked on as a prodigy any

longer by people who understand. I realize now that the people I know here have compared me with pupils of my own age, pupils like Povla Tomek. And perhaps they've compared me with young artists of my age, like Josef Hofmann. And all the time I was thinking myself just as good as these others that have had so much praise while I've had only criticism. I began to understand last summer, when I was home. But it's clearer to me now. I shall work after this with a different feeling about myself. And I'm going to keep on until I succeed, no matter how long it takes. I must succeed." She gave way, suddenly, to a tremulous sadness. "If I hadn't let myself be deceived lately by a false happiness, I'd be further along in my music today. If I hadn't been foolish and weak, and——" She struggled to control herself.

Brandt patted her on the shoulder. "Well, now, I say to you that you give me signs of a better understanding of your work. Comes the next lesson you play good. So?"

"I hope so, Mr. Brandt. Good-by. It was good of you to talk to me as you have today."

When he was alone Brandt walked over to the desk and took up Novak's picture. "So it is you she loves," said he in French. "And you concealed it from me. But I have found you out." He laughed. "I think you also have helped teach her."

He placed the picture back on the desk and sat down in the easy chair. When, later, The Koubek came to call him to lunch, she found him sleeping.

CHAPTER XXV

THE Wentworth homestead stood close to a deserted road in the Connecticut hills. A weather-beaten house, built these two centuries, and sagging a bit in the roof, it still gave promise of safe shelter for another generation or two of the family that had occupied it since it was a tavern, and the road it faced a post road, brisk with the coming and going of coaches. Now, the tavern was but a legend, perpetuated by Silas Wentworth and his wife, Maria, who lived alone in the old home, save for the occasional visits of children and grandchildren, and the boarder or two taken each summer since the last daughter had married.

It was here that Josephine went in June at the suggestion of Grace Mandeville. She was dismayed at her first sight of the house, and wrote Stanhope that it looked like an old barn with a porch across the front and some windows cut in the upper story. But old Silas, upright despite his seventy-odd years, sparse of frame, and keen of eye, pointed out its venerable wonders with such pride that she concealed her dismay by praising the porch and old orchard.

"Them's new!" Silas exclaimed. "My pap planted thet orchard th' year after th' railroad cum an' th' coaches stopped runnin'. An' I put on th' porch when I married Marier. Built it with my own hands, an' it's put t'gether better'n any porch in this land's made in these days. Marier an' th' gals set out th' flower garden. Wimmin folks don't seem t' think a home's a home till it's got posies growin' round it. An' I guess they ain't far from right, either."

Josephine replied that she had known, the minute she stepped inside the house, that it was a real home. And

to Maria she said, with enthusiasm: "I never saw such big rooms made so cozy. I just love it. And such wonderful old mahogany furniture! I have a friend who would envy you every single piece of it. I lived with her the first winter I was in New York. But she's married and living in Europe now."

Maria said she didn't set much store by that old furniture. She'd be glad to get rid of every piece of it. It was that heavy it almost broke your back trying to move it. She liked the new pieces better. She'd bought just as many as she could afford. And Josephine, looking at the golden oak varnished to a brilliant shininess, said she used to like that kind of furniture, too, before she came to New York, but now she liked mahogany better. She was glad she'd been given a room here that had the mahogany in it.

"I feel as if I'd always known you," she said to Maria. "You remind me so much of my Aunt Mary." Maria, after hearing all about Aunt Mary and seeing her picture, said she guessed a young woman like that wouldn't feel complimented to know she'd been likened to a grandmother over seventy. "Seventy!" Josephine exclaimed, looking at small chipper Maria, whose cheeks were still ruddy. "You don't look anywhere near that old!"

Maria, who was always reticent with a new boarder until she "got her measure," as she expressed it, felt that she had Josephine's measure by the end of the first day. And when Stanhope ran up from New York for a few hours' visit, a week after Josephine's arrival, he found her as much at home as if she had been there for months.

Josephine was amazed at Stanhope's enthusiasm over the exterior of the house. "It looks as if it had grown from the soil on which it stands, as much as that patriarchal elm that shades it," he said. But he deplored the porch, even while he sat there by Silas Wentworth's side, both men

with their feet on the rail, while Silas told his legend. And if, in the enthusiasm engendered by so appreciative a listener, Silas now and then exercised the historian's prerogative of amplifying fact by fiction, he felt no qualms of conscience. To him the legend had never yet received its fullness of romance. Before Stanhope came, Silas had told Josephine she was "th' keenest listener he'd found in many a year." But after an hour with Stanhope he transferred the tribute to him.

The small-paned windows, cut close to the sagging roof, were Stanhope's special delight. "I shall call it the house of the seven windows," he told old Silas. And Silas tugged at his iron-gray beard and said, with twinkling eyes:

"I guess if ma heerd that she'd say it'd be nigher th' pint t' call it th' house of th' seven children. For she's hed seven, an' ev'ry one born in th' room over th' dining room, an' all livin' an' gittin' children of their own, pretty fast, too."

Stanhope went to see Josephine this first time with a feeling of uncertainty as to his reception. But she took the visit as so natural a thing that he was at the same time relieved and perturbed. He found her less pale and languid than when she had left New York, but her eyes told him that she was going through a turmoil of suffering. It was the memory of her eyes that made him, when he returned to his apartment, walk straight to the picture of Novak that stood on his desk, wrench it from the frame, and tear it across the face.

The morning Sam Sterling had come to him, haggard, dishevelled, to tell the result of his interview with Josephine, Stanhope had been more shocked at Sam's condition than surprised at the news he brought. And he had felt, when Sam left him, that Josephine would recover from her infatuation for Novak far sooner than Sam would recover from the blow she had dealt him. He did not share

Sam's firm conviction that Novak was deliberately leading Josephine into danger. He knew him to be a man who was stimulated by arousing love; who found in the experience something of the same sensuous delight that, when he chose, he could enkindle in others through his music; but who was in no sense the libertine.

Yet Stanhope had not been free from anxiety regarding Josephine. He realized that the average young girl in love becomes the pursuer, and that when a man like Novak was pursued, he immediately became bored and withdrew. To know a girl so different from the average, so ingenuous as Josephine, must be a new and enticing experience to him. In this lay her danger.

It was with a feeling of acute relief that Stanhope had heard of Novak's departure for a long tour, and that within a few days after his return he was to sail for Europe. He felt that this meant the end of the affair so far as Novak's interest in it was concerned, and that Josephine could not long remain at such a height of ecstasy in her feeling for a man so completely out of her life. But he had not expected the signs of tragedy so evident after Novak had sailed. He had not needed to speculate as to what had happened. He felt that he knew, as well as if he had heard the story from Josephine's own lips, that she had learned the quality of Novak's interest in her. A girl less artless, less idealistic, he reasoned, would have been able to adjust herself to the revelation. But Josephine! How long was this distress to last?

With each successive visit to the farm, Stanhope saw that Josephine's morbid depression was yielding to this wholesome environment. After the second visit he stayed the week-end, putting up at the antiquated hotel in the sleepy village some two miles from the farm. By this time the grand piano, rented in Hartford, had arrived, and he found Josephine so absorbed in her music that she

seemed to grudge even the hours she gave to him. Yet he felt she was not sorry he was there. Her natural acceptance of his presence told him that she found something of comfort in it. His visits grew more and more frequent. But he held himself well within the limits of friendship.

On a sultry afternoon in late August, Josephine came out on the porch and threw herself into the hammock, swung in the shade of the honeysuckle. She had practiced until weariness forced her to stop. Stanhope was coming for the week-end, and as she lay with half-closed eyes, she thought it would be nice to see him, for he always made her feel as if she really was somebody instead of just a child, as all her other New York friends seemed to think. He was the only one among them that ever talked to her as if she was worth talking to. How different from Novak! For Novak had never talked to her seriously about anything. She hadn't realized it at the time, but she knew now that he had always turned the subject when she began to speak of music or anything she thought he was interested in. And he'd never showed the least interest in her life or her music.

A deep flush suffused her face. She pressed her hands to her eyes to keep back the tears. For a time she lay quite still. When she looked up again she was pale, and her lips were firmly set.

Mr. Stanhope would be here soon. She had seen Timothy, the hired man, start to meet him with the horse and buggy, half an hour ago. How kind Mr. Stanhope was to her! If she hadn't learned that great men wanted to be with girls like her just to "forget the heaviness of life," as Novak had said, she might think that Mr. Stanhope really cared for her. But he was only amusing himself, just as Novak had done. For he, too, was an artist. Not as great as Novak, but great enough to care nothing for a girl like

her, except for a short time. She was not to be deceived again. And perhaps it was well she had learned her lesson. It would never be possible for her to suffer again as she had suffered this summer.

Stanhope was about to knock at the door, when he saw her. He started toward her, then stopped. She was asleep. One arm was thrown above her head, with the slender hand half hidden in the dark hair; the other hung, relaxed, over the edge of the hammock. Her lips were delicately parted, and her soft round bosom rose and fell with long peaceful breathing. Stanhope turned away, his own breath coming quickly. He went to the old-fashioned rocker, threw aside his hat, and settled himself to wait until she should awaken.

As he watched her, he had no desire to hasten the awakening. He felt that he was seeing her now for the first time: for never before had he seen her freed from the domination of her ambition. Looking at her he said to himself that she had never been wholly the woman with him because her music was ever uppermost in her thoughts. He had doubted whether or not she was fitted to become an artist, but he doubted no longer. This girl, so touchingly beautiful as she lay asleep, was not of the artist mold. She would never achieve the fame she so passionately desired. She mistook an overpowering enthusiasm for ability. He believed if she had been born in a center of art, where opportunities to appreciate values are many, she would not have attempted to become a concert pianist. But, born and raised in a provincial town, her talent, by contrast with those about her, had seemed phenomenal. How long would she keep up the fight for success? How would she meet the tragedy of failure? For failure would be a tragedy to her unless, before it came, her nature had turned to its natural expression—love. Yet this would not happen. Her true self was too deeply sub-

merged by her ambition. Would she ever find her true self? He felt she would. But the woman in her had been deflected by her talent, which was sufficient to justify development, but not big enough to justify the development she was seeking. Yes, the woman in her had long been submerged by ambition. If it had been otherwise she would probably have married, very young, some capable man like Sam Sterling, or some half-baked intellectual. He was glad this hadn't happened. He was glad she was trying for the bigger thing. For afterward, when she had given up this absorbing ambition, and risen above her disappointment, she would be the finer woman for the experience. . . . She was exquisitely feminine. It was this that Novak had seen in her. It was this that would draw many men to her as soon as her ambition waned. For all her independence and courage, she needed something to cling to. She was now clinging desperately to her music and, a little, to him. If he could keep the place he now held in her life until that time when the crisis came in her music, for it was sure to come, if he could keep his place until then, then he would speak. To speak before would mean disaster, not only to that for which he hoped, but even to friendship. This was as certain as that he loved her. And never had he felt so certain of his love as he felt today.

Josephine stirred and awakened. As she turned and saw Stanhope watching her, she looked embarrassed and sat up hastily. Slipping her feet to the floor she swung gently back and forth. "I must have been asleep," she said. "Have you been here long?"

He went over to her, drawing his chair after him, and sat down by her side. He smiled, as he took her outstretched hand, and said, "You should take a nap every day out here in the open air."

She yawned. "I must have slept a long while, for I feel

stupid. But I was so tired. I practiced five hours today. I'm working at the Chopin Etudes. And I'm practicing Schumann, too." She grew more animated. "I believe I'm going to be able to play Schumann well enough even to please Brandt. Perhaps, after all, I'll be a player of the romantic school, as Grace Mandeville calls it. I want to play some Schumann for you, sometime, and have you give me your opinion. May I?"

"Yes," said Stanhope, his eyes and thoughts on the tempting mouth and soft curves of the throat.

She looked hurt. "If you don't care any more than that about it I don't want to play for you. I thought it would help me, but if you're going to be bored——"

"On the contrary, I shall be delighted." Stanhope spoke with well-feigned heartiness. "But," he added, in gentler tone, "you mustn't work so hard during this hot weather. You ought to close your piano for at least two weeks and forget there is such a thing as music."

"I couldn't do that! I should be miserable. And I must work harder every day, to be ready for Brandt in the fall."

"But you will accomplish more if you take a short rest."

"I can't rest. I've got to keep at it every day. If I stopped for two weeks, I should worry all the time for fear I was losing something I'd gained. And I mustn't lose one thing. I've still got so much to learn, there's no time to go over the ground twice."

As she spoke, Josephine clasped her hands tensely. And Stanhope knew that such blind determination meant she was unconsciously beginning to doubt herself.

He took some letters from his pocket. "We stopped at the postoffice, and here's your mail."

Josephine took the letters, eagerly. "One from Aunt

Mary! I didn't expect to hear from her today. And here's one from Georgette, and, oh, one from Alice Sothern, I mean Holbrooke. I never can think of her as married to that stiff Mr. Holbrooke. I'm going to read them right now."

She opened Aunt Mary's first. As she read the second page she frowned and shook her head. At the end she grew crimson and hurriedly thrust the sheet back into the envelope.

"It's all about my coming home before I go back to New York. Aunt Mary says that everybody in Parksburg will think it strange if I don't go back at all this summer. She says I must come if it's only for two weeks. But I'm not going." She crumpled the letter in her hand. "I'm not going. I can never go back until Brandt has told me when I can appear in public. It was different last summer. Everyone was so excited over the boom that I was forgotten. But the boom is dying out now, and they're beginning to think of me again. Since they've been disappointed about the boom they expect more of me than ever. I can tell that from their letters. Aunt Mary doesn't write that way. But the rest do. I wouldn't go back now for anything in the world. I couldn't!"

Stanhope saw she was struggling to keep back the tears. "You are right," he said, soothingly. "It would be foolish to subject yourself to such a strain."

She looked at him, gratefully. "You always seem to understand. But oh, Mr. Stanhope, Aunt Mary will be hurt if I don't go to her. And she's doing so much for me. She wants to share the money she's made, with me, so I can keep on with my work. And if I don't go home this summer she'll think I don't care. And I care dreadfully. But I can't go."

"She will understand sometime."

"But I want her to understand now! She'll be hurt, and it makes me so unhappy to hurt her. She's been like a mother to me."

"Yes, it will hurt her if you refuse to go and don't tell her why. I judge she's a woman of sense. Treat her that way. She will understand."

"I couldn't tell her! I couldn't tell anyone but you!"

"You think it will hurt her more to know the truth than to receive your refusal without an explanation?"

"No," said Josephine. She sat nervously braiding and unbraiding the fringe of the hammock. Would she acknowledge it was her pride that kept her from telling Aunt Mary the truth? Stanhope wondered. And he waited with more eagerness than he realized, to see how she would meet the test.

He saw her face slowly soften. And when she looked up at him her eyes were warm with affection.

"It will hurt me to tell her," she said, quite simply, "but I would rather hurt myself than hurt Aunt Mary. I'll write her I'm not coming and I'll tell her everything."

"I knew you would do it!" exclaimed Stanhope.

"But you made me see it was what I ought to do. I'll write tomorrow and when I get her answer I'll let you know what she says."

"I know what she will say, but I shall be interested in hearing how she says it." Stanhope paused for a moment, then asked in a casual tone, "How is our friend, Sam Sterling, getting on?"

It was the first time Sam's name had been mentioned between them since he left New York. Stanhope, who had felt for some time that this silence on his part would arouse Josephine's suspicions, had decided to break it.

She looked away from him. "Aunt Mary said at the end of her letter that he's going West next week, to be gone perhaps for months."

"He probably needs a rest after the exciting business year he has been through. Sterling is a fine young man. I hope to know him better."

She broke into passionate protest. "Don't ever speak to me about him! He said some dreadful things to me! I can never forgive him! I'm trying to forget I ever knew him!"

"Forget Sam? You must never do that." Stanhope spoke with quiet firmness.

"You don't know. I can't explain."

Stanhope laid a consoling hand on her arm, "Tell me about it. I am your friend."

"I can't. You mustn't ask me to. It—it—hurts."

"Then don't tell me. I have had misunderstandings with friends, myself, that I didn't want to talk about." He took the unopened letters from her lap. "Come, read these. You surely want to know what Mrs. Holbrooke has to say. And this letter from Miss Randolph may have some news, undoubtedly has if there is any to be found. You may trust Miss Georgette for that. I'll open them for you. I don't approve of the way you tear open envelopes." He took a penknife from his pocket and cut the envelopes neatly. "There! reward me by reading Mrs. Holbrooke's first, and then tell me what she says."

Josephine dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. "You read it to me. She writes such interesting letters."

A smile lighted Stanhope's face. "Are you sure you want me to read it?"

She nodded.

"I can read it through the envelope," he said. Assuming a manner of mock seriousness, he raised the letter to his forehead and read, in a monotone:

"You dear child; I'm the happiest woman in the world. I have a son aged two weeks. His name is Sothern Holbrooke. He even now puts Raphael's cherubs to shame.

I'm doing famously. This is all I'm allowed to write you today. I proudly sign myself, Mater Jubilate."

Josephine stared at him. "You're joking!"

Stanhope laughed like a boy and handed her the letter. "See for yourself."

She took out the sheet, glanced at the few lines and looked up, amazed. "It's almost word for word! How did you know?"

"I had a note from her yesterday, but mine began: 'You desolate bachelor.'"

Josephine laughed as she had not laughed in weeks. Then, with tremulous tenderness, she said:

"I'm so glad for her. It's the life she always wanted. She used to say it was the only real life for a woman. But I didn't think she actually meant it, she had so much. But now I know she did mean it."

"Of course she meant it. Every true woman feels that way." Stanhope spoke quickly, fervently.

She looked at him, very shy, a little offended. "Then I'm not a true woman. I've never felt that way."

The color surged to his face. He made a quick movement toward her, then slowly settled back again in his chair.

"Let us see what Miss Randolph has to say. If she knows the news her comments will be characteristic."

Josephine drew Georgette's letter from the envelope and glanced over the first page. "She wants to come here for a few days, but I'm not going to let her. I'd be upset for a week after she'd gone." She turned the page. "No, she doesn't say a word about Mrs. Holbrooke, so she hasn't heard." She laughed. "Doesn't this sound just like her? 'You're to let me know this month without fail if you're to be with me next winter. I command you to come back to me. Grace will be away. She's accepted a position to teach in a girl's school in some outlandish place

in Kansas. May the saints preserve her, if she wants to be preserved! I'd jump off Brooklyn bridge and be done with it. A girl's school! I'd rather teach in a penitentiary, for that's a place where women never predominate, thanks to the sins of men, or shall I say the leniency of Judges? But to the point. Promise you'll stay with me next winter. I can't swing this place alone. Don't go back on me. Be a dear and stand by me for one more season.'"

"What's it all about?" asked Stanhope. "Had you thought of living with anyone else?"

She slipped the letter into the envelope. "No, I hadn't thought of living with anyone else. I want to live alone. I know I can work better if I do. I told Georgette before I left, but she wouldn't believe I'd really decided. But that's what I'm going to do."

"Impossible! You can't live alone in New York." Stanhope spoke with finality.

"Of course I can live alone. Other girls do."

"You can't do it. You're not that kind. It's out of the question."

"I'm going to. I must give every bit of myself to my work next winter. I can get along faster if I'm alone."

"You don't know what it means to live alone in New York. You would go to pieces in a month. There are many reasons why you shouldn't do it. You would learn them all before the winter was half over."

"But I don't want to live with Georgette. She gets on my nerves."

"I can understand that. She gets on my nerves, too. But you don't have to see much of her. And next winter she will probably be more considerate because she will know you stayed to help her out. She's flippant and rather hard, perhaps, but fundamentally she's sound. You might look long and not find as desirable a place. You would be very likely to get into a worse atmosphere. You must

remember she has some affection for you, and that is something not easy to find in New York. Even if you leave her it must not be to live alone. You have yet to learn that one can be lonelier in New York than in a desert. I hope you will never learn that as some have done. And loneliness would make work impossible for you."

Stanhope argued with Josephine until he had gained her promise to try one more winter with Georgette. She had nothing to offer in defense of her own plan other than the hope of increased opportunity to work uninterruptedly, and the earnestness with which she urged this point showed Stanhope how determined she was to give up everything for her music.

And throughout his visit, her constantly reiterated decision to keep on studying, no matter how long it might be necessary, dismayed him. He saw that, although she was more light-hearted than he had seen her in months, she was taking her work more seriously than at any time since he had known her.

He had brought her books to read from time to time, and she had read them all with persistent earnestness. But he felt that this persistence was too closely associated with her ambition, to be taken as a definite sign of her development. He told himself that he liked her better after all when she was just the young girl, charming because so natural. He regretted that it was becoming an obsession with her to use everything as a means of furthering her work. It was very well for her to feel that she must enlarge her capacity for appreciation of other artistic things than music if she would become a genuine musician. But such a growth should not be forced.

"You oughter tell her not t' practice so hard," Silas said, as he and Stanhope sat on the porch the next afternoon with their chairs tilted back and their feet on the rail. Silas was smoking his pipe, Stanhope a cigar. The

two had become, as Ma Wentworth put it, "real cronies." Stanhope never tired of the old farmer's vigorous philosophy and his tirades against "them city fellers who come t' Connecticut t' do fancy farmin' an' don't know no more about it than a horse knows how t' raise oats. Like t' see 'em try t' make their livin' off th' land. They'd find thet a gol-durned diff'rent job."

But today Silas seemed to be thinking more of Josephine than of white-fenced farms and vegetables nurtured to early maturity in glass frames. "You oughter tell her," he repeated. "She won't listen t'ma, who's tried t'git her t'let up a liddle sence th'hot spell. She don't seem t' care about nuthin' but thet there pianner. When she ain't playin' it you c'n see she's thinkin' about it. She won't go nowhere with th' young folks about here. She's hed plenty chances. Two or three of th' young city fellers hev ben after her. But she won't hev nuthin' t'do with 'em. Thet ain't nat'ral fer a young gal like her. She's missin' her good time. There ain't ever ben a prettier gal aroun' here an' what good's it doin' her? This givin' up all th' fun young folks has t' learn playin' th' pianner, ain't t'my thinkin'. Ma an' I ain't never hed anyone in this house as a boarder, we like as well as her. Thet's why I'm feelin' she ought not t'give up ev'rything fer practicin'. It wuz diff'rent with thet Mandeville gal. She wa'n't th'kind thet got into folks' hearts. There wa'n't any young fellers tried t'git aroun' her when she wuz here. She'd ben willin' enough if they hed. Thet's th' cussedness of wimmin. Th' ones thet can't want to, an' them as can, don't."

Silas smoked his pipe reflectively, and Stanhope, knowing him well, waited for him to finish. But it was some time before he said, as if there had been no pause:

"My gals all married young. We missed 'em mighty hard, but we'd ben sorry ef they'd stayed with us. This waitin' t'git married till you're sot in your own way, ain't

right. An' a woman oughter bring up her children when she's young. An' a man th' same. I wuz a grandpap twict over at your age, fer I'm takin' it you're goin' along in th' forties."

"A year or two."

Silas chuckled, slyly. "Ma says you're after her. But I don't b'lieve it. You got too much sense t'tie up with a young thing like her, even if she'd hev you, which I'm thinkin' ain't th' case." He lowered his voice and leaned toward Stanhope. "Ma thinks she's in love with some feller thet don't come round here. She do seem unhappy at times, but I ain't thinkin' it's thet, although we hev heerd her cryin' at night. She don't do it no more. I told Ma it wuz b'cause she wuz homesick, but Ma thought diff'rent. These wimmin are allus sayin' it's love, ev'ry time they see a gal mopin'. But she ain't mopin' much now. Guess you've cheered her up."

"She used to cry at night?" asked Stanhope, his voice unsteady.

"Yep, but she don't do it no more. Seems t'sleep as good as th' next one, now. But she's workin' too hard. An' what's th' use?"

"That's just it. What's the use?" said Stanhope, and felt that Josephine would never forgive him if she could overhear his ready agreement with this old farmer's practical view of her work. "But," he went on, "it's not for you or me to say what she ought to do, when those who know more about the matter have encouraged her to give up everything for her music."

Silas snorted. "Anybody thet'd tell thet purty gal t' give up ev'rything fer th' pianner's a raskel. It's jest rob'ry t'my thinkin'. Robbin' her of her good time. She'd better marry an old bach like you than foller sech advice."

"That would suit me."

Silas dropped his feet from the railing, and his chair came down with a thump.

"Wall, I'll be gol-durned!"

"That's between you and me."

"You bet it is. Ma'd never let up on me if she knew, fer I've told her she didn't know nuthin' about human natur, t'think sech a thing." He settled himself again, his chair tilted back, his feet on the railing; and then, grudgingly, "I s'pose she might do worse."

"She might," said Stanhope.

Silas pulled on his pipe until his head was clouded in smoke. "I ain't got anythin' agin you. You're a first rate feller. But this marryin' atween a young gal an' a man old enough t'be her father is a mighty foolish thing, t'my thinkin'. Jest as foolish fer you as fer her. Ma'd think it wuz real romantic, but I think it's gol-durned dang'rous."

"It's not likely to happen," said Stanhope, moodily.

Silas gave him a keen glance. "Wall, if you're goin' about it in thet way, guess there ain't no call fer me or anyone else t'worry about her."

Just then Josephine came out on the verandah, all in white, her face as near to radiance as Stanhope had seen it for months, her arms filled with flowers, red and blue and yellow and white.

"I called you to help me pick them," she admonished Stanhope, "but you didn't hear me. You must help me arrange them for the supper table and the piano."

Silas got to his feet and shook the ashes from his pipe. "Wall," said he, "Tim an' me must git t'work. Milkin' has t'be done Sunday same's other days. I've allus thought 'twan't right fer th' Lord t'make cows thet way. Seein' as Sunday's a day of rest, he oughter made 'em so's they didn't give no milk th' seventh day. Mighty queer thet th' Scriptur says a man sha'n't work but six days of th'

phine, a kimono thrown around her, her hair hanging in a long braid down her back, sat on the floor of her room, by the window, her arms on the sill. She thought she had never seen so many stars at once; millions of them giving the same faint light, and a few shining brighter, like tiny suns. When there was a moon, all the stars, even the brightest ones, were dimmed. It was that way with music. The world was full of little musicians, just as the sky was full of little stars. There were a few brighter ones that shone brilliantly among the little ones, until the moon came up. Then all were lost in the moonlight. That was what she was working for—to rise like the moon among a world of little stars and dim them.

But there was the sun, that dimmed even the light of the moon. That happened in music, too; not often, but still it happened. How wonderful it must be to be the greatest of them all! Novak was like that. When he played the people forgot all the other violinists. How it must hurt the others to be forgotten! It must hurt even when they knew that Novak deserved his fame. Perhaps they wouldn't envy him if they knew his fame didn't make him happy. She used to think she made him happy, but she knew now she had only amused him.

Why could she think of Novak tonight without suffering as she had suffered for weeks at every thought of him? Was she growing cold and hard? He had told her that she did not love him, that what she thought was love was worship of the artist, the great man. Was it true? How was she to know? He was the only man she had ever longed to be with—to be near—the only man who had kissed her as a lover. She could never have been like that with him if she had not loved him. Oh, she had loved him! But, if she loved him so much why was she beginning to think of him with less unhappiness? Perhaps something within her had died. She hoped so, because

then she could never suffer again as she had suffered since that last day.

A sudden burst of song broke the silence of the night. There were high, thin, girlish voices and rough boyish ones. The sounds drew nearer, and a wagon came into view. As it passed, Josephine could see the young people huddled together, some swaying back and forth as they sang, others waving their arms. There was a burst of laughter as the wagon bumped over a "thank-you-m'am," followed by little screams as the jolted ones struggled to right themselves. Then the song was resumed. The wagon passed out of sight, but the song harshened the night until it ended in a shrill piping on high notes.

It was like a crowd of Parksburg young people returning from a corn roast, thought Josephine. She smiled, patronizingly. How silly they were. She pitied them. They knew nothing of big things or big people. She was fortunate in comparison with them.

From far off came a last faint sound of laughter. Then, again, the night silence.

She was glad they were gone. She was glad she didn't have to know them. It was nice that they were happy, but they weren't happy in her way. Probably this night's ride would end in at least one engagement, for that was the way young people nearly always got engaged in Parksburg, after a dance, or a ride on a summer night. She wouldn't want to get engaged that way. She would want love to come slowly, so slowly she could fairly see it coming; and perhaps that would be the sweetest time of all, to watch it come——

But why was she thinking of love? She could never love again. Never.

Her head sank on her arms, resting on the window sill. She felt suddenly helpless, lonely. She sensed, vaguely, that she wanted something, but she could not name it. She

knew that a weight was bearing down on her, a weight that smothered and pained, dully. She could not look into the night, that until now had seemed so mysteriously sweet. Even the silence had become a pain. She held her breath, hoping for a sound of the laughter that had disturbed her. But all was still. She was alone.

When at last she lifted her head and pushed the hair away from her face, moist with tears, she gave a little gasp of surprise. The full moon was rising over a distant hill. She watched it breathlessly as it mounted the sky, paling the stars. Sometime she would rise like that in a world of little stars. And she must rise alone, as the moon rose. The stars had a million other stars for company. But they were all alike. And they all faded before this moon that sailed alone, and brightened the world as all the stars together could not brighten it.

And Stanhope, walking toward the village, watched the moon rise over the distant hill, and thought of Josephine as she lay asleep, freed from the urge of her ambition, as soft and lovely as this light that shone serenely above. He wanted her! He wanted her as he had never wanted a woman before! Not even the woman to whom until now he believed he had given all there was in him of love to give. But he had never felt toward her so wholly the lover as he felt toward Josephine. She had been greater than he, greater in mind and in wordly position; greater in her giving, for she had more to give. And he had lived in the world she created for him. How he had worshiped her! How he had followed her from one European capital to another! How he had feared her! For he had always feared her.

Yes, he had always feared her. That was why he had ever waited for her to give rather than lifting a hand to take. She had set him aflame, and the fire had consumed

him. She had thrown him aside at last, not cruelly, but as an act inevitable. It had taken him years to understand that if he had dominated her even intellectually, she would not have tired of him. It had taken him until now to understand that she had not had the whole of him.

His step quickened. He breathed the cool night air in full long breaths. No, she had not had the whole of him. She had not had this love that was quick with desire for possession and soft with longing to protect. Was any love of man for woman complete that did not have this softness? The other was adoration and passion mingled. This was the love that meant a sure joy in realization; a love that meant home and children.

He went from the road to the edge of a field, and resting his arms on the fence looked off over the moonlit scene. How peaceful and hushed it all was! The vacant field, the black woods beyond, a farmhouse with its one light glimmering in an upper room. His heart was asking for a happiness as sweet and beautiful as this scene before him. For years he had failed to look for happiness, far less to reach out for it. That other had not been happiness. It had seared him as the burning heat of noonday. True happiness was like this soft moonlight that melted all disharmonies into tranquil beauty.

Long Stanhope stood, motionless. When he turned again toward the village, the peace of the night was in his face.

CHAPTER XXVI

As Josephine drew near to Brandt's house one morning in the following November she was thinking that he was going to be pleased with her today. Yes, she was sure he would be pleased, although he had been unusually stern with her this fall. And she was glad, for that meant he was taking a great deal of interest in her. She knew now that when he didn't criticize it meant that he was indifferent.

How he had criticized her Schumann when she came back from the country! That had discouraged her at first. He had told her that she made Schumann sound as if he were a sentimentalist instead of a virile romanticist. How she had cried when she got home from that lesson! But she was never going to cry again, no matter how much Brandt ridiculed her. And she was sure he would be pleased today, for she had worked so hard to overcome the defects he had pointed out. He had seemed just a little pleased at her last lesson. And then she had spoiled it all by the impulsiveness she was always showing at the wrong time. If she only hadn't asked him whether she could study the concerto after she had these Schumann pieces perfect. His "Pst!" had made her feel like a little fool.

But some day he would tell her she could study any concerto she wanted to. It might be a long time from now, but he would say it! He didn't understand yet how determined she was. She didn't blame him. She had always been too sure of herself. She could see that now. He had probably thought her determination was just overconfidence. But he would soon understand. He would see that she could work as seriously as any of his other

pupils. How splendid it was to work for such a great man! She ought to be thankful she had him for a teacher.

When she entered the studio Brandt greeted her so kindly she glowed with pleasure.

She went to the piano and began to open her music case. "Wait," said he. "I think we will talk together for a little while."

He had so often talked to her about music, turning the lesson into an impromptu lecture—a method she had grown to take as an encouragement, for she knew he used it with his best pupils—that she went to him confidently, taking the chair he indicated. And he stood by the fireplace with one arm resting on the mantel. He kept her waiting for some minutes before he said, slowly:

"I have something of the importance to say to you. I say it not quickly. It comes after much thought."

It flashed into her mind that he was going to tell her he had decided to give up teaching now instead of in a few years as he had said last spring. She knew he had accepted only three new pupils this fall. Everyone had been talking about it.

"You're not going to stop teaching, Mr. Brandt?" she asked, impetuously.

"Ach, no! I have not that happiness."

"I'm so glad! I was afraid, about my own work. I'm selfish and want you to teach me until I'm through."

"That is the subject of which I would speak. I must say to you something that gives me sorrow to say. I cannot teach you longer."

Josephine looked relieved. He was simply going to have one of his cranky spells. She was used to them now, although this was the first one he had had with her since she came back. Yet he didn't seem a bit angry. He was a queer man!

"You think I'm going to do like I did last winter," she

said, quietly. "But nothing will ever interfere with my music again."

"I think nothing like that. I know you would work as much as any teacher could desire. That comes the reason why I speak. I have not in me the conscience to let you continue. It comes now two years since you study with me. It is to be seen you have not the understanding to become the artist. I must tell you so now. If I say it not, then I do you wrong."

Yes, he was going to have one of his cranky spells. He was tired today and she must suffer for it.

"But you know, Mr. Brandt, I'm willing to work until I do understand. You think I'll get discouraged, but I'll not, no matter how much you expect of me."

"That comes the point. I expect nothing."

She flushed. "What have I done to make you say that to me?"

As she spoke, she feared his anger. But he showed none. He drew up a chair and sat down facing her, leaning forward as if to emphasize his words.

"I will make it plain." He spoke with a kindly patience she had never seen in him before. "You come to me two years ago a young girl with much talent and the warm enthusiasm that was a promise for fine results. I say to myself, I have not in many years taken a so immature pupil, but it will come a pleasure to me, now that I am old, to once more train a fresh and youthful talent to become the artist. I feel at that time that your so excellent talent, your so warm enthusiasm, are much. I say, I teach this young girl until I know if she have the most necessary quality of understanding. I mean not the understanding that comes from the heart but from the mind. One day I think I see it in some little sign, then again I see it not at all comes many lessons. But I say, I cannot tell. She has but begun to learn. I wait a year, and I still feel not

sure. I wait another year, and I say it is not there. I feel that to be true last spring. I was to tell you then. I know not now why I did not tell it to you. In the summer I say, two, three times, I write to her and say to her to come not back. But I was busy. I teach in Geneva two months. Then I forget until I come here and see the name on my books, the same days, the same hour as before. I have the patience and I wait to see if you do better. Five lessons you have had since then. They tell me you have come as far as you can come with me. You can sometime play better as you play now. But you can never come to play as the artist. It gives me the sorrow to speak this to you. It gives me the sorrow because I have the liking for you. I know you sincere. I send many pupils away from me comes these many years past. I send them quick. I pack them off. I say, 'Go!' and that is all. But for you, I want not to hurt you. So I explain."

Josephine had listened to this ultimatum with a look that varied from fright to impatience. One moment she believed Brandt meant what he said, the next moment she took it all as a new form of his sternness with her. He had told her so many times that she had "not the understanding," and he would send her home. Then everything had gone on as before. At those times he had showed anger. That he showed none today frightened her.

He waited for her to speak. She bit her lip to keep back the tears. She felt that she did not deserve such severity. She seized with desperation on the only thing to which she could attribute his attitude.

"Mr. Brandt, is it because I asked you if I could play the Schumann Concerto that you think I have no understanding of how little I know? It was a foolish thing for me to do. I see it now. I know I can't expect to play it for a long time."

He looked at her, blankly. "I know not what you mean about the Schumann Concerto?"

"Don't you remember I asked you last week if I could study it, and you were angry? Is that why you don't want to teach me any more?"

Brandt rose from his chair.

"It is too much! I have the patience to say to you all my reasons, and you ask me that so foolish question! You think I say I not teach you for the reason you ask to play a concerto of a difficulty too big for you? I have not so much as the remembrance of that question. It is not to believe you cannot understand better as that! It brings more the proof to me of what I say. You will not make the artist. You are like the so many others who have a talent and the ambition and nothing besides." He came close to her. "Now you listen. Your lessons with me are no more. I send you away never to come back. That I should have said to you after the first year. I feel a worry that I teach you the second year. I feel a worry because it cost you money to learn of me. I have the remembrance you say to me, the time you began, that the money it was given you by kind people that you might become the artist. Well, I give you back the money I took last year. That comes a right thing for me to do. I have the sure knowledge I make the mistake to teach you the second winter. I make that all right with the money. I send you a check. I think perhaps you know sufficient now to teach a little. You can teach in that town you came from—I have not the remembrance of the name. But to be the artist? That will be the impossible. So I teach you never again."

Josephine shrank back in her chair, her face white, her eyes pleading.

"Don't say such things! You can't know how you hurt me!"

Brandt set his lips to control himself, before he said with quiet sternness:

"I will have no hysterics." He went to the piano and came back with her music case, holding it out to her without a word.

She sprang from her chair. "No!" It was all she could say.

Brandt flung the case on the chair. "You make me an insult when you accept not the dismissal."

Josephine looked at the case, then at Brandt. She put out a hand to touch his arm, but it fell lifeless to her side.

"I insult you?" The words came in gasps. "I would come to you on my knees to please you! Since the first day I came here I have had no wish in the world but to do what you wanted me to do!"

Brandt came to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"I know you speak truth. Well, I now make the request that you please me. I make the request that you give me the pleasure of saying with courage, 'Good-by' to the lessons."

His look, his tone, even more than his words, brought realization of the full truth to Josephine. She clung to the chair for support. The color came and went in her face. She breathed heavily through parted lips. She put out a hand, with a piteous gesture. "Mr. Brandt! You don't know what you're asking of me. You're asking me to give up my life to please you. For it would kill me. I can't go. I can't."

Then, with a rush, her strength seemed to come back. She went near to him, her eyes warm with appeal, her lips trembling. "Don't you see what it will mean! There's all the hopes I've had since I was a child—there's all my future—gone! There's——" she stopped. When she went on it was as if speaking of a visible terror. "There's Parksburg! The people who believed in me so much they

made sacrifices to send me here. They worked to give me a benefit, and some of them bought tickets when they couldn't afford it. They thought I didn't know. And I did! And I've loved them for it. All the time I've been working I've been thinking of them and how much they would feel repaid when I'd succeeded. They thought I'd be ready by this time. But they're learning I must wait. And I'm learning I must wait. If I have to give up, it will kill me, and they—they——" she seized Brandt's hand. "Oh, Mr. Brandt, don't send me away! You mustn't! Oh, please, Mr. Brandt, be patient for just this one winter. I know I've tried you. Forgive me! I'll not try you so much after this. Take back what you've said. Take it back just for this winter. Let me have one more chance. That's all I ask!"

Brandt looked at her compassionately but firmly.

"Impossible. You have not the understanding."

She stared at him for a moment, then resentment engulfed her. She loosened her clasp with a low cry.

"I have not the understanding! It is you who have not the understanding! To throw me off like this is nothing to you! You are great! You don't know what it means to sacrifice and suffer for love of music. You work only in the way that pleases you. You're afraid I'll be a disappointment to you and you send me away. You wouldn't do that if you'd ever been through what I've been through. If you'd ever struggled and struggled to get ahead. I know what I'm talking about. I've heard how famous you were years ago in Europe as a pianist. And then, when you began to teach, how all the biggest pupils came to you and worshiped you because you were the great Brandt. And it's that way here in New York. You're the great Brandt! People point you out at the concerts and on the streets. You've always been like that. You've had everything you wanted. You could pick and choose to suit yourself. You

want to please yourself now by sending me away. Oh, you're cruel. You're cruel because you don't understand. You've never tried to do a great thing and failed!"

She stopped, choked by her vehemence. She looked at Brandt with eyes that said what her throbbing throat, her dry lips could no longer utter. Then her resentment changed to fear. Brandt stood, shrunken, his head on his breast, one hand uplifted as if to ward off a blow.

"It is enough," he said, his hand falling heavily.

Slowly he raised his head and looked upward.

"She knows not of what she speaks. She knows not of what she speaks." He raised a clenched hand. "I have not suffered! I have not worked in vain! I have not known the disappointment! I, who saw the vision. Who dreamed the dream. Who thought I held within my hand the key of gold to open new treasures to the world. Who found it but a key of brass. Who climbed but to fall. Who became but the teacher." He laughed, as one who mocks. "Ach! No! I have not known the disappointment! I am the great Brandt! The great Brandt! For is it not greatness to spend the many years but as a teacher? Even so! I come the great man to the world that knows me not! That can see no sign of what I am within!" His head sank. "Of what I am within."

In the long silence that followed, Josephine stood breathless, trembling. When Brandt again looked at her he was calm.

"It is over. I give you no more the fear. But it is even so what I have spoken. It is even so. I show you."

With the step of an old man he walked to a cabinet that stood near the desk. "Come."

She went to him as one hypnotized. He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the cabinet.

"It comes many years since I open it. It is to me as opening a grave. But I show you so it may come that you

see I have the understanding of your disappointment. I have more as that. I have the understanding of a larger disappointment as yours. I show you. But first I explain." He kept one hand on the key in the lock and rested an arm on the cabinet. He stood erect, with head raised, and spoke with a strange calm.

"You speak truth when you say I was one time the famous pianist in Europe. That comes many years ago, near to forty years. I study since a child with great teachers. With Thalberg and with Liszt. They make the prophecy I become great as they. That was not for me to believe. But I have always the success when I appear. I play in many capitals and find the applause. That gives me the happiness. Then I come near to thirty years old and have the dissatisfaction. I ask, am I always to speak but the thoughts of others? I ask so because I feel thoughts of my own I would speak. I would be the composer. I feel the urge for that. I burn to write music. Comes two, three years, I compose in summer when I have not to play. But that comes not satisfaction to me. I have not the so fresh inspiration. I say, I give up the piano. I give everything to composing. I have a talent to compose, I am told. I am told it even by the great Liszt. He lament that I play no more. But he say, 'Make always obedience to the voice within. Only so comes the great accomplishment.'

"So I play no more. I have a little money. I live cheap, near Prague. I have much beautiful music within me, and I write always with joy. Ach! Such happiness as then was mine! I write so comes three years. Three times I hear my music played for the public. I hear the great Liszt play my concerto. I hear Rubinstein play my sonata. I hear the Royal Orchestra at Vienna play my symphony. I hear all this because they would do favor

to a famous pianist. The public applaud. But what do they applaud? The so wonderful performers. They ask not again to hear my works.

"But I get not the discouragement. I listen not to the advice of friends. I listen not even to the great Liszt. I listen only that they tell me I have a talent to write. When they tell me it is but a so-so talent, I smile. I feel they have not the understanding of me. I think greater things as I have yet spoken. I study my works for their weakness. I find the need of the more sure knowledge of counterpoint and orchestration. I go to the great teachers and study. I learn all they can teach me. Then, once more again, I write."

Brandt paused, his composure shaken. When he went on, it was with a thick unsteady voice.

"Eleven years I work. Eleven years. I think it come the fault of the world I am not accepted as the composer. I cannot so much as get my music produced. Then comes the time when the so great and generous Liszt gives a festival of my works at Weimar. With what joy I enter upon this opportunity! Ach! The catastrophe! I ascend to the height in the sight of the world, and the world sees my fall. They have so the indifference they have not so much as the pity for me. Only Liszt has that."

He looked at Josephine with dull eyes. She stood, as she had stood from the beginning, her hands clasped to her heart, her eyes fixed on his face.

"I arise from the fall a broken man. I arise with the knowledge that my so great failure comes from within. I know at last I have not the understanding to become the great composer. But I realize too late. I am then more as forty. I work so long to become the composer I am no more the pianist. I cannot again become the pianist. I have forever lost the technic. Since I make for myself

the retirement from the concerts have come others, young and gifted, who play as great as I once played. The world, it has forgot me. Only the few remember. What remains for me? Only to teach. So I become the teacher. I, who thought to write my name among the great composers."

Brandt opened the door of the cabinet, then closed it and turned the key. "Within are my works. I cannot show them to you. I cannot myself so much as look upon them. They are to me as are children quickened to life in their mother's womb, but to die in their birth."

He drew his hand across the cabinet with a caressing touch. "Ach! Had I but the courage to destroy them I perhaps find more of peace!" He sighed, heavily. Then, with an effort, he turned his back on the cabinet. The sight of Josephine, standing rigid, breathless, brought him to himself. He went to her and took her hands in his. He looked again the Master.

"Now you come to understand," said he, "that I, also, know the disappointment. I made for myself a life different from the life I desired. Even so must you."

She swayed and would have fallen if he had not caught her. He led her to a chair and sat beside her, stroking her hands. "Let us be brave. There comes for all of us the hour to be brave. Excuse, if I have made trouble for you with my sorrow. I tell it you so you may have knowledge how disappointment comes also to others. It is well I make you to obey me and come here no more. I have you not know the fall from the height like as my fall."

But she could not listen. She could only weep until her breath came in long sharp sobs, racking her body. She knew it was over. She knew she could not plead again. In the story of his own failure, she had heard her sentence pronounced beyond recall.

Her tears ceased, but the sobs still came, a dry torture. She leaned her head against the chair, her face drawn and white.

"I'll go," she said. "I'll go." But she did not move.

Brandt watched her, saying nothing. She grew quiet and sat with closed eyes, relaxed, as if sensation were dead. Brandt rose and began to walk up and down the room. He saw the music case, and carried it to her, laying it on her lap. She started, looked at it, and the crimson rushed from throat to forehead, then ebbed, leaving a ghastly pallor. She rose, with the case in her hands.

Brandt drew her to him and kissed her on the forehead. "Good-by, dear daughter. I see in you the sign of one who some day finds a greater happiness as any art can bring to woman."

She moved her lips, but no sound came.

"There, there!" said he, heartily. "The disappointment, it will pass with you. Comes a little time and you will say thanks to me that I am so a friend today."

He went with her to the door and opened it. He put out his hand. "Come, say to me the last, 'Good-by.'"

She laid a limp cold hand in his. He gave it a warm clasp. Then, as she passed into the hall, the door closed after her.

CHAPTER XXVII

GEORGETTE, alone at a table for two in a crowded restaurant, gave a sigh of relief as she saw Eugénie walking leisurely down the long narrow aisle. She stood up to attract her attention, and gained a nod of greeting. But Eugénie did not increase her pace. Attired in a mauve suit, her fur hanging loosely about her shoulders, a chic black toque setting off her red hair, she was a conspicuous figure, at which the men looked with explicit, the women with veiled, interest.

"Such an entrance, my dear, is worthy of the adventuress in a melodrama," said Georgette, as Eugénie seated herself in the chair the waiter drew back for her. "You've kept me waiting half an hour."

Eugénie smiled with irritating good nature. "I've been at Madame Regnault's. An evening gown. Ravishing. Three layers of chiffon in diminishing tones of green."

"What do I care about your evening gown when I'm famishing?"

Eugénie drew off her gloves. "You are nervous today."

"With good reason," snapped Georgette. She leaned across the table. "What do you think has happened?"

"His wife has come back, I suppose," drawled Eugénie.

Georgette laughed, shortly. "As if that would matter." She dropped her flippant manner. "It's something serious." She paused an instant, then added, impressively, "Brandt has turned the little Prescott down for good."

Eugénie opened her bag, took out powder case and mirror, powdered her nose, put back the case and mirror, closed the bag and reached for the menu.

"Of course," said she, opening her lorgnette and studying the card.

Georgette beckoned to the waiter. "Bring two dry Martinis." Then to Eugénie, sweetly, "I forgot that you are never human until you have had a cocktail."

"I was about to remind you," came the rejoinder, equally sweet.

They laughed. The cocktails came and lunch was ordered.

"How is she?" asked Eugénie.

"Shipwrecked in mid-ocean."

Eugénie shrugged a shoulder. "There's a lifeboat at hand."

"You mean Stanhope?"

"Yes."

"I wonder."

"A drowning person always seizes the first thing within reach."

"But she's got her eyes, ears, and mouth closed."

"Then she will float until she's rescued."

"If she does it will be because I'm holding her head above water," said Georgette. "I declare, with appreciation of my debasement, that she has turned me into an incarnation of sympathy. If she would only make a fuss. Rave! Cry! But, no! She goes about the apartment like a ghost."

"But she told you?"

"No, indeed. I guessed it. It was just a week ago that by a lucky chance I went home at noon, which is something I don't do in months. And I had the fright of my life. For I found her lying just inside the door in a dead faint. She had on her hat and coat, and her music case was lying by her. So I knew she'd just come from a lesson. I got the smelling salts and threw water on her, but couldn't bring her to. Then, just as I was about to 'phone for a

doctor, she began to show signs of life. Before long I had her on the couch. When she found I was going to get help she looked scared to death. She wouldn't have a doctor. So I gave in, for fear she'd faint again if I opposed her. But I was frightened stiff. When I asked her what had happened she said she'd been taken ill at her lesson and that Brandt said it must be the change from the country to the city food. Think of the dear little innocent lying to me like that, offhand. And think of my swallowing the lie whole without stopping to remember that she had been back more than a month. Change of food, indeed! But it was clever of her, wasn't it?"

"I've done her an injustice. There's more to her than I thought."

"Aha! Here are the oysters! What a relief!" exclaimed Georgette as the waiter served her. "They all lie at such times," she went on, dipping an oyster in the cocktail sauce. "Their first thought is secrecy. They want to hide the disgrace. For a while they're so concerned about this that they hardly think of their disappointment. All they think of is how to keep people from knowing. Oh, I've seen plenty of that sort of thing. But failure will out, the same as murder. I blush to confess it took me two days to catch on in this case."

"I'd have caught on in two minutes."

"You would have made the same mistake I did. I thought it was Novak."

Eugénie showed her first indication of genuine interest. "It probably is Novak, and she's throwing you off the track."

"No, it isn't."

"A woman lies more readily for love than for art."

"For heaven's sake, Eugénie, cut out the cynicism. I'm in earnest about this. The tragedy of the thing has got me."

"Tragedy! Stuff!"

Georgette flung a contemptuous glance. "May the saints preserve me from ever getting to be like you. I have a heart! Haven't slept for a week."

"You look it."

"I am proud to bear outward testimony of my sympathy."

"Like carrying the banner in a funeral cortège?"

"Exactly. But the banner is getting heavy. There's no one holding the cords. I've thrown you one and you refuse to catch it."

"Save yourself the trouble of throwing it again."

"Oh, come now, don't be so hard on her!"

"Hard on her? I'm the only one who treats her with proper consideration."

"You!"

"Yes, I."

"What's the answer?"

"The answer? I treat her as a woman, while the rest of you treat her as a musician."

Georgette smiled. "A rather clever distinction, I'll acknowledge."

"The key to the whole situation. Since she was old enough to sit at a piano, she has been bowed down to as a musical prodigy. She has never known what it means to live a normal girl's life. She has been walking on stilts. When she comes out of this she will be walking on her own feet. And very pretty ones they are. May they take her swiftly to the place where she belongs. The domestic hearth. Sympathize over her exploded career? Would I had thrown the bomb!"

"Don't be so conceited. You're not the only one who has questioned her ability to make good as a pianist. I've had some doubts on that subject myself. But you miss the point. I'm not wrought up over her exploded career, but

because she's up against it. She's going to go through Hades before she adjusts herself."

"She will come out of the fire purified of her ambition."

Georgette sighed. "You're impossible, Eugénie. I wish I hadn't told you."

Eugénie gave attention to the salad the waiter placed before her. "Bah! Wilted!" Then she said to Georgette, with a shrug, "You think me heartless because I insist upon saving my sympathy for those who need it more?" With mingled warmth and disdain, she went on:

"Your little Prescott is up against it, I confess. But not as others I've known. In comparison with them she's lucky. She might have got into the clutches of a charlatan teacher. New York is full of them. Piano teachers, violin teachers, vocal teachers. Yesterday I was in Strachini's studio. Have you been there? No? Then make it a point to get in some day. It's worth seeing. A suite of ornately furnished rooms. Attendants to announce you, take your wraps, serve you tea before or after the lesson as your nerves require. You should have seen the procession of pupils passing in and out of the holy of holies where Strachini administers worthless advice on how to sing. Fifteen minute lessons for fifteen dollars. A dollar a minute. Some of his pupils can pay it. He's the rage among the fashionables who take up singing as a fad. But the pupils are not all that kind. He has many a Josephine Prescott. Earnest hard-working students who need to count every penny. I saw some of them, heard them, too. I should want a dollar a minute if I had to listen to them again. But I was sorry for them as I shall never be sorry for your Josephine. They're bankrupting themselves in good faith, and they're being taught in bad faith. They will keep at it until they appear in public. Then God help them! They go on the concert stage thinking it a stage of glory. It proves a Place de l'Execution. I've heard

them die in frantic gasps trying to reach a high C. I've heard others turn the keyboard into a race track but to end as Also Rans. There's real tragedy for you. Encouraged and petted by teachers who rob them. Humiliated in full view of the public. Jeered at by the critics. And there are others with genuine talent, but not enough for a career. Yet they have to make a living. So they're forced to become like Mandeville—hacks. I've more sympathy for one Mandeville than for a host of Josephines. Your shipwrecked ingénue will drift into a sheltered harbor. She's beautiful and has the appealing charm that bores women and attracts men. She's three-quarters woman and one-quarter musician. No, I take that back. She's not a musician. She's musical. A difference wide as the seven seas. She has nothing but talent and temperament. What's talent without brains? A coach-and-four without wheels. What's temperament without intellect? An engine speeding down grade without brakes."

"Not even Brandt can outdo you when it comes to malediction, dear Eugénie."

Eugénie laughed, graciously. She turned to the waiter who hovered over her. "The coffee. And bring it black." Then to Georgette, "Will you stay in the apartment alone after she's gone?"

"Gone where?" asked Georgette, innocently.

"You're going to keep her with you? Maudlin sentimentalism!"

"Now if you will listen to me as patiently as I listened to you, I'll appreciate the courtesy," said Georgette, settling back in her chair.

Eugénie glanced at her watch. "I have ten minutes more. At two I'm to meet Ransome and give him my valuable opinion on his design for St. Michael's Cathedral."

"Aha! I understand now why you're so certain today

that matrimony is the one solution for the semi-artistic woman."

"Beloved," said Eugénie, with purring softness, "if I ever marry it will be in a shroud; for marriage would be my death."

Georgette's retort was an inscrutable smile. She returned to her theme.

"Do you suppose I'll let her fight it out in Parksburg? It will be bad enough for her here. It would be the death of her there. And she wouldn't go back. She'd jump into the river or use a gas tube before she'd go home. No, she is going to have a chance to fight it out here. And Aunt Mary will pay the bill. But I am getting ahead of my story. As you're in a hurry I'll pass over how I let her know I had guessed the truth. I expected her to rave against Brandt and declare she was going to another teacher. That is what all dismissed pupils do, so far as my experience goes, which is a long way, alas! But, no, she accepts Brandt's verdict as submissively as the Jews accepted the Ten Commandments. Brandt must have put it mighty strong to her. Wish I had been within earshot. Strange, she doesn't seem angry with him. But, Lord! how hard she takes it! She has the most woebegone death-in-life look I ever saw. The only time she has shown any spirit was when I suggested she could be successful in a small way. She will have none of that. It's the real thing or nothing with her. It's true she is lucky to be able to choose. I told her so. I was dying to bring in the subject of matrimony as a solution, but didn't dare. Then Providence, who has hitherto ignored me in emergencies, appeared in the disguise of a postman bringing a letter from Aunt Mary. When she read it she was bowled over. Aunt Mary, if you please, is going to beat her niece to the altar. She is to marry one Mathew Hoover. What a romantic name! Said Mathew has become the possessor

of a nice little income from some nice little oil wells. Aunt Mary has now also a nice little income from oil. Well, they are to unite their nice little incomes, and their lives, as well.

"Believe me, dear Eugénie, I didn't let my opportunity slip by. Wish that what I said could have been taken in shorthand. Any magazine would give me a hundred and fifty for it. It was a charming commentary on love and marriage. For the platitudes I uttered I cry *peccavi*! In my peroration I said that if she married, Parksburg would be prouder of her as a bride than as an artist. I spoke of the worthy and eligible Sam Sterling. I forecast his future in the legislature, then as Congressman from his district, then as a Senator at Washington. I had the presence of mind to stop at the White House. I knew she would see through that. Have I told you I wanted Sam for myself, and he would have none of me? To my dying day I shall pride myself on my generosity in pleading for him. But it's all over with Sam so far as she is concerned. If she hadn't had a taste of New York life, or known men like Novak and Stanhope, I'll wager he would get her, although she has frequently said she could never love a man she couldn't look up to. Isn't that rich? I supposed that particular genus feminine had gone the way of patchwork quilts and home-made bread. But to resume. When I saw there was no hope for Sam, I began to play Stanhope's game. But I was diplomatic. I still talked of Sam. I said that, of course, he wasn't highly educated or polished or famous, like Mr. Stanhope, for instance, but the raw product was pretty sure to be sound and faithful. Well, she didn't say a word. But she looked mighty self-conscious. Do you suppose he'll get her? Let's bet on it."

Eugénie acquiesced with readiness. "I'll lay my money on the affirmative side."

"Then it's off. Two affirmatives never made a bet."

"So for once there is something about which we are agreed! But I'll propose another bet, to mature in three years. If by that time Winthrop isn't bored by his lovely ingénue wife, I will pay any wager you care to make."

"I don't know about that," Georgette demurred. "Give me until they're engaged to think it over."

Eugénie began to draw on her gloves. "Which means, in legal terms, that you're given ninety days. And now, having been drawn here under false pretenses, for I supposed you were going to prove a diversion in the midst of an arduous day, I shall let you pay the bill."

"I always know, when you assume such a disinterested air, that you are vitally interested."

Eugénie rose and arranged her fur about her shoulders. "I am. The prospect of a pretty nobody from nowhere marrying a blue-blood from Boston is a subject of fascinating interest to me. Good-by, dear Georgette. The next time we lunch together I shall claim the privilege of being hostess."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ONE afternoon late in February Josephine came into the living room dressed for the street, and, going to the desk, opened a drawer and took out a concert ticket. At the sight of the name printed in heavy type she flushed. For a moment she stood, irresolute. Then, as if suddenly coming to a decision, she laid the ticket on the desk.

No, she could not go!

She turned away and sank into a chair.

Why had she been so foolish as to think she must go? That she must see him again if she was to know whether her love for him was really dead? She had thought it was dead until she had heard that he was coming to America again. Then the old suffering had come back. How often she had told herself that she would not go to hear him. But when the seat sale opened she was among the first at the box office. Something had seemed to draw her there. And now, today, she couldn't bear the thought of seeing him. But how could she understand herself until she had seen him again? If she had really loved him, how could she so soon begin to care for another man in that way? . . . She had loved him! Oh, how well she knew! But . . . now?

A warm glow came to her eyes as she thought of Stanhope.

How wonderful he had been to her all through this terrible winter! She could never have stood it if it hadn't been for him. He loved her! She had known it for weeks. And he knew that she knew. But he hadn't said anything. He loved her enough to be just her friend when she needed

a friend more than anything else in the world. And, perhaps, he'd known that she'd been frightened at the very thought of his being more than a friend. But he couldn't know why. He couldn't know that she'd been afraid she might grow to love him. She'd been afraid because she could only think of love as something that brought unhappiness. She'd felt that way until that day two weeks ago . . . the day he'd told her she must stop pitying herself. How that had hurt her! And how angry she'd been when he said that if she gave up studying just because she couldn't have a public career, it would prove that she didn't really love music. That she loved only the thought of being famous. . . . What horrid things she'd said to him! Then she'd stopped right in the midst of it all. . . . It was the way he had looked at her that stopped her. . . . She would never forget that look. Never! . . . No man had ever looked at her like that before. . . . It had made her feel as if everything in the world had suddenly become beautiful. . . . She'd been so happy for days afterward. It was such a different happiness from anything she'd ever known before. . . . So much finer and sweeter. . . . And then it had all been spoiled.

She rose and pressed her hands to her eyes to keep back the tears.

She couldn't bear to be with Stanhope since this old suffering had come back. . . . Oh, how much she'd suffered during the past year! That was why she could understand what suffering meant to others. That was why she'd written Sam that she was sorry for the dreadful things she'd said to him. How quickly he had answered, and how kindly! But it might almost have been a letter from a stranger. Yet he still cared. She knew it. . . . How long Sam had loved her! For years and years. But she'd never loved him. Not for a moment. Perhaps if she hadn't come to New York . . . But, no She could never have

cared enough for Sam to marry him. . . . She loved so many beautiful things that didn't even interest him. . . . She could no more marry a man like Sam than she could go back to Parksburg to live. . . . She hoped he would marry. She wanted him to be happy. Sometime he would realize that she could never have made him happy. They were so unlike.

A tremulous smile passed over her face.

She'd never felt that she and Stanhope were unlike. Not even from the very first. . . . Yet he was so far above her in every way. But she never thought anything about it when she was with him. . . . Oh, he was so fine and splendid! . . . But how was she to know if this feeling she had for him was love? She had been so sure it was. . . . And then . . .

She walked slowly to the desk, and laid a hand over the ticket.

Should she go? What if she found that her love for him was not dead? No, she would not go! She had grown to think of him as someone far away from her real life. She was not ashamed to have loved him. She was only ashamed of letting him be like a lover to her when he didn't care for her at all. . . . How perfectly Stanhope understood her! He hadn't asked her to go with him today, although he'd taken her to all the concerts she'd heard this winter. He knew that if she went at all she would want to go alone. He knew it, although she had never told him about this other man. That time she had started to tell him he had stopped her. He'd said that no experience in our lives could hurt us if we came out of it with a fuller understanding of others. How often she'd thought of that since! And she knew that she could never have understood what it meant for Stanhope to ask nothing of her this winter while she was trying to rise above her terrible disappointment, if she hadn't known this

other man who had thought only of his own pleasure when he was with her.

But how she had loved him! Perhaps she still loved him. If her love was dead why had she suffered when she knew that he was coming back?

Hesitatingly she took the ticket from the desk and dropped it into her purse. Then, quickly, she left the apartment.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHE sat in her seat near the stage, unmindful of the restless disturbance about her. With her eyes on the door through which he would appear, she waited.

A sudden hush fell over the house as the door opened. She looked quickly away. There was a burst of applause. Her eyes came back to the stage as if drawn against her will. A quiver passed over her.

Novak was approaching the footlights with his slow composed step.

She sat tense, her gaze fixed upon him. He bowed with distant courtesy to the great audience that was greeting him with a turmoil of enthusiasm. Then, with uplifted head, he waited.

She felt the force of his serene dignity; of his broad, high forehead and firm mouth; of his steady eyes. She saw the charm of his tall slender figure; his splendid head; his full gold hair. And she looked at him in confused wonder. Why did he not seem the Novak she had known?

He raised his violin and held the bow poised. And that moment the house was silent.

As he played the opening *Andante Cantabile* of a Händel sonata, and she heard the tranquil melody sung in liquid tones, she leaned forward, eagerly.

He paused an instant, the bow held alert, close to the strings. Then, with superb vigor, came the *Allegro*.

She caught her breath; her eyes brightened. She listened as if entranced by this playing that preserved the classic symmetry of the music without the sacrifice of inspiration. And, as he played the *Allegretto*, she smiled as if filled with calm happiness.

Throughout the Bach *Suite* that followed she sat motionless, her eyes alone telling the revelation that came to her as, now with firm virility, again with pliant delicacy, he traced the melodic designs, making them ever clear and rhythmic; and voiced exaltation, gaiety, and noble fervor, each quickened to a living utterance, yet pervaded by classic dignity.

At the end there was an uproar. Shouts of "Bravo!" came from the upper balcony. Josephine joined excitedly in the applause as Novak came back again and again.

But when, at last, he came close to the edge of the stage and bowed gravely, she shrank back in her chair and shielded her face with her muff. In a flash came the remembrance of that day she had tried to avoid him as she left Brandt's. He had overtaken her. He had teased her because she had tried to run away from him. And she had hid her face with her muff.

But she felt only a faint disquiet at the recollection.

She looked at him as he went out. Why could he not thrill her today, except when he played? Before he had never thrilled her when he played. But she had always been thrilled when she saw him.

Was her love really dead? If it was over——

Her lips curved to a charming softness.

When he came back she saw his glance sweep over the house. But she did not try to hide her face.

He played a Brahms sonata. She was enraptured by the engaging beauty of the music with its undercurrent of melancholy. The haunting *Andante Tranquillo*, alternating with the ever-quickening *Vivace*, filled her with a sadly sweet happiness. The transcendent closing bars, with the violin singing the theme full and poignant, wrought in her an ecstasy akin to pain.

She saw him go to the pianist and grasp his hand. She saw his reticent acceptance of the applause and his desire

that the pianist share it. Then she saw him quietly leave the stage.

She drew a long breath. He was wonderful! How could she ever have said that he was cold? That he had no temperament? How could she ever have thought that Brahms was dull and heavy? She knew now what Brandt had meant when he said that Brahms was the last of the great classicists and the greatest of the romanticists. And it was Novak who had made her understand!

With impatient eagerness, she awaited his return. For then she would hear him play again. And when he came she saw him as the great artist.

She responded with exquisite delight when he presaged rather than voiced love in old Italian classics; when he was delicately amorous in airs from the France of the eighteenth century; and elusively sensuous in old Viennese dances; and consummately brilliant in a *Moto Perpetuo*.

During the long ovation at the end she sat quite still. He came out for the last time, and bowed with a gesture that seemed to say, "It is over." She watched him leave the stage. She caught a last glimpse of him through the open door. Then the door was closed. The lights on the stage went out.

She made her way slowly from the hall and through the foyer. But when she came out into the daylight she stopped on the steps and looked about her as if suddenly realizing where she was. Then she saw Stanhope standing on the sidewalk. His face was white. He looked up, and when he saw her, he lifted his hat. Then he looked away.

Swiftly, with a light step and shining eyes, she went to him.



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